

Sukhoi Strike Missions during the War

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Monday, 13 January 2020 07:06

Written by Anchit Gupta

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Madhabendra Banerji was born to Shri TR Banerji on 4 Jan 1934 in Calcutta. After completing his education, he joined the Indian Air Force in 1954, and was selected to train as a pilot with the 65 Course. During that time, he trained at Begumpet and later Jodhpur and was commissioned 16 Apr 1955. His initial part of his career was spent flying Vampire fighters, apart from Instructional Tenures. He was also an A1 QFI from FIS. By 1965, he was a Squadron leader and was appointed commanding officer of No.24 Squadron operating the Vampire aircraft. He took part in the Operations against Pakistan in the Eastern Sector.

[Home](#) » [History](#) » [1971 Bangladesh War](#) » Sukhoi Strike Missions during the War

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Madhabendra Banerji was born to Shri TR Banerji on 4 Jan 1934 in Calcutta. After completing his education, he joined the Indian Air Force in 1954, and was selected to train as a pilot with the 65 Course. During that time, he trained at Begumpet and later Jodhpur and was commissioned 16 Apr 1955. His initial part of his career was spent flying Vampire fighters, apart from Instructional Tenures. He was also an A1 QFI from FIS. By 1965, he was a Squadron leader and was appointed commanding officer of No.24 Squadron operating the Vampire aircraft. He took part in the Operations against Pakistan in the Eastern Sector.



Flt Cadet M Banerji, seen at Begumpet, undergoing training prior to commissioning in the IAF. He is seen with a MS Fleuret trainer, which was trialed by the IAF - he was one of the only six cadets to have flown on this type.

Induction of Sukhoi-7s and Introduction of tactical night fighter flying in the IAF (1969-70)

In 1966, the Indian Government evaluated the Soviet Sukhoi-7 BMK fighter bomber and eventually signed an agreement to induct them. The first Sukhois were received in March 1968 and six Squadrons would eventually form. Around the same time, the first batch of IAF pilots were sent for conversion training in the Soviet Union, Banerji being one of the chosen few. On his return he was posted to the first Sukhoi-7 Unit, No.26 Squadron, and was involved in the introduction of tactical night fighter flying in the IAF.

"We were in the first batch of the pilots to be trained on the Su-7 in Russia. After coming back, I had gone for a tactical course on the Sukhoi.

The first thing the Russians asked me was – *“How much night flying have you done on the aircraft?”*.

I replied – *“none”*.

They replied - *“you are not using the aircraft to anywhere near its capability.”*

They had very detailed data from NATO exercises done earlier that year – clearly showing the difference in damages and impact across Day and night, low, medium level and high level. The lesson learnt was that you must fly in the night if you wish to protect your forces.

Till that time, night flying in IAF was limited to a few sorties for the sake of it. As a regular part of the syllabus, with tactics was never carried out as part of a night force, especially low-level flying. The first lot of night flying was carried out when we were pilot officers (mid 1950s) and for our Flight commanders and Commanding officers it was not easy to adapt to something they had not done earlier in younger days. Many were terrified of the thought. But consequently, night flying never really was taken up seriously.

I enquired from the from course members if navigation would be a challenge? Afterall, the Su-7 had just an airspeed indicator and a compass which was way down in the display and required you to take your eyes away. The response came “there is nothing as good as total darkness for navigation and I should experiment for myself”. If you were to ask any of the fighter pilots who grew up in the age when night flying is common, they will vouch for the ease of navigation on a dark night.

After I came back, incidentally, there was a meeting at the Command to discuss operational syllabus and I was sent for it from the Squadron. I raised the aspect of introducing night flying and there was an uproar at the thought. I was taken to the SASO who questioned me on the subject and shot down my idea on the face of it. He called the Canberra fleet officers and asked them how they would feel if the Su-7 took up the role given to them. I do not blame them as they did their operational flying in a different era.



Sqn Ldr M Banerji with Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh - right after he had given a flight to the Chief. This was in May 1968.

Thereafter, I went to Air Headquarters for a conference and did not raise the issue in the conference. However, most people knew of this simmering suggestion and discussed it unofficially. The Director of Operations (senior most officer in charge of flying ops at AHQ) had got wind of the discussion and raised the issue himself with me. He said, everyone is against you, but I have not forgotten about it and you will get the clearance in time.

In the coming months, the letter from Air Headquarters came clearing one squadron in each command to do the night flying syllabus. The Command gave the task to 26 Squadron, but the squadron did not have their heart in it and did not really utilize the opportunity to its potential, resulting in suboptimal results.

My CO in 101 sqn, KC Khanna, got the go ahead from WAC, and he gave the task to me. We started the task and had initial difficulties, but slowly we started to make it work. While we could not get the entire squadron operational but most of the senior pilots had got operational. Simultaneously, TACDE was formed and moved to Adampur and they were actively testing out night flying too. Sure enough, as soon as the war began, TACDE put in night flying to full use and they were the only force to reach Sargodha and were effective.

For his efforts with the Su-7 fleet, AVM Banerji was awarded the Vayu Sena Medal. His citation reads - "Squadron Leader Madhavendra Banerji has been a Flight Commander of an operational squadron since June 1968. He has flown a total of 3,826 hours and holds a Master Green instrument rating with an Instrument Rating Instructor endorsement. He was one of the first batch of pilots who had undergone flying training on a new type of supersonic aircraft. He displayed considerable initiative and professional skill and in a relatively short time trained the pilots of Squadron to full operational status. Throughout, Squadron Leader Madhavendra Banerji displayed professional skill, initiative and devotion to duty."

1971 War

When the conflict with Pakistan arrived in 1974, Madhabendra Banerji was flight commander with 101 Squadron based at Adampur flying the Sukhoi-7s. The unit operated mostly in the Shakargarh Sector . As he would recall :

"When war happens, human behaviour alters, and different people behave and react differently to the circumstances. There were many a case of brilliant pilots not performing anywhere near the flourish they were known to have. Sometimes the other aspect is true too. People whom I considered in my own squadron weak and was at the point of separating them out, found out how wrong I could be when the war came about and how these men went about. I realised, with all my experience how little I knew of my own people. Especially two officers, both of whom are no more, having passed away after retiring from the IAF. I really thought they should not be sent on missions as unnecessary casualties could occur. But when the time came, they were there, they went up and did fantastically well. I personally learnt a lesson too (to never underestimate).

Low level flying and tactics

Another need of the war is to adapt to situation and modify tactics on the fly. As an example, one of the beliefs was that the lower you fly on the Su-7, the safer you are. Everyone was supposed to fly 100 meters or so above the obstruction level on the ground. But we all knew in war time, this would be a casualty and pilots would go lower. In the case of the Su-7, this could be a particularly dangerous situation, especially if you have dropped speed. All it takes at that height is for some arm fire to hit at the wrong place in the airframe. We were in the Chamb sector and we had this flying path where we could cut through a part of Pakistan and re-enter India allowing us more time to loiter around, but it left us open to enemy fire. We faced a lot of damage as a result

I was preoccupied with recce missions and planning the sorties, till Iqbal Ali came back from a sortie with a wound in his leg. The wound was due to small arms fire from the ground somehow managing to enter the cockpit. This gave us the realisations that the ground fire was getting us when we were crossing the border (four times in the process of going and returning). We discussed this and we decided to re-route and remain within our territory, taking a longer route. But this was not a problem as thought shorter, our time over target was still good enough to drop our bombs and return. Incidentally, the army had a problem with this, because they saw less of the aircraft in the air from where they were.

Of the four aircraft that I lost, two were just because of this – low speed – small arms fire and damage. So, we quickly decided to change tactics and moved to higher level for flying. Yes, we will see Ack-Ack, but it was not much of a problem. Ruski's had learnt from the Vietnam war that one could fire from some distance and don't need to come close. But how much of that we could apply, we had to learn on the go.

Squadron Losses

We also lost aircraft to Air to Air combat, where Wahi was brought down by a Mirage. Here also, as the flight commander, I feel I could have done better. For instance, jettisoning the drop tanks and how that affects the aircraft, none of us had done it. The pilot notes clearly state that when you jettison the drop tanks, nose will pitch up, but when you are flying at the speed of sound, how much is it and how is it, you can't be sure. Unfortunately, at the time, he could have done this and got away but was shot down.

Another major change I wanted to make later, is that after Wahi's loss our effectiveness had reduced. The PAF was giving us chase and our pilots were forced to drop bombs in a rush, spent less time on target and get out of the hot zone. So, I decided we should go as 4-aircraft ships, two to attack and two to cover at a higher altitude. This would take care of the chase, but it would mean the number of such missions we can take reduces. This time again, I was told Army will be unhappy with this and if I was wrong, "heads will roll". I said *sir – "heads will roll, one way or the other. Either I get shot down up there or I say my head will roll"*. But we decided to go ahead, and this newer system worked out well. We straight away found the chasing by PAF fighters stopped. In addition, the command put two MiG-21s in the air which helped too. Making changes is essential in real time. One cannot have a doctrinal approach that everything must go just as per the book.

Other than TACDE, the only other pilot to get to Sargodha (but during day) on a recce mission was Chotu Mehta early in the campaign. He got back, though he flamed out as he touched down at Amritsar. He was being chased. We had anticipated this but were very confident we will not be shot down given the pattern we had worked out. This mission was to give comfort to the IAF that we can penetrate despite the air defence systems in place by PAF. (Author Note: Chotu Mehta was posted with 32 Sqn, also operating the Su-7 during the war)

A memorable attack on Gujrat Airfield

After 11th/12th December, our effort had reduced, and we had a stand down. After Chamb, there was nothing to do for the sqn. We were itching to do something or the other towards the war effort and looking for targets. During one of the missions, “Guru Shinde” (Retired Air Commodore AP Shinde, 5671) had done a recce on the Gujrat airfield (in Pakistan). The photo interpreter of this sortie told us that though our intel was that the airfield has no activity, the images showed the airfield had safety vehicles parked on the side and gave us a sense that it was being used off and on by aircraft.

Guru Shinde lead a 4-aircraft formation to attack the airfield. The last of the aircraft was told to take the recce camera shot as well. The photo he took has four bombs – one is bursting, the second one is just about touching the ground and started splitting, the third one is hanging in the air and the fourth one, his own, just left the aircraft. It is a classic photo that got taken and adorned the Air Headquarters for a long time right after the war as they put it up on the entrance. I am not aware where this photo languishes now.

Other Efforts

These random reconnaissance efforts were driven by personal initiatives and it was not that somewhere, someone was sitting, collating all the inputs coming from various sources and putting a coherent picture of it to form a target list, thinking ahead. That kind of thinking was lacking. The officer in the squadron had a very narrow view of the operations and is not bothered with what is happening elsewhere. One of the constraints was resources and we had got so accustomed to working with limited resources that some of the big long-term projects or ideas were never considered.

Inability to maximise the potential of the Su-7 in the 1971 war

We had, since the acquisition of the aircraft been requesting a certain type of armament (S-24 Rockets), but the acquisition process led to delays and it only landed with us, three days prior to the 1971 war. There was very little we could do to put it to use, except to conduct some live trials. Guru Shinde did test them out by dropping a few on huge fuel dumps outside Lahore.

Similarly, we had requested navigational aids, cryptography equipment that could help with pilot communication in the air secretly. All the equipment was eventually were given but too late to be of use for the 1971 war. There was insufficient time to practice and use these. This has been one of the biggest drawbacks I have seen in the IAF, we wait endlessly. I wonder what more the fleet could have achieved if these were in places in time."



The late arrival of the S-24 rockets was also confirmed by Air Marshal Nana Menon, who was with the other Su-7 squadron. He had mentioned that around the 8th or 9th of December, 26 Sqn received the first batch of S-24 rockets from the USSR. The crates containing these rockets had instructions only in Russian. No English translations were sent or received from Air HQ/Command HQ. Some of the pilots and technicians who had been trained in the USSR translated the release conditions. Then Sqn Ldr TJ Fernandez and late JS Ghuman carried out the first mission armed with S-24s. The target- Sulaimanke Headworks. Though the operation was successful, the patient survived. No noticeable damage was done to dam. S-24s were fired in anger without any trials. Decades later, post the 1999 Kargil, the IAF did indeed setup a targeting cell at Air Headquarters and the job fell on none other than Wg. Cdr BS Dhanoa, later to be Air Chief of the IAF.

For his efforts in the 1971 War, Sqn Ldr Banerji was awarded the MVC, one of the only two Sqn Ldr rank officers of the war to be awarded. His citation reads - *“Squadron Leader Banerji, a senior pilot in a fighter bomber squadron, led no fewer than 14 missions in S-22 aircraft within the first week of the present war against enemy targets, most of them in support of our Army in the Chhamb battles. During these missions, he destroyed two enemy tanks and two guns. On three occasions, he was personally responsible for attacking the enemy in the face of heavy ground fire, thus relieving pressure on our own troops. He has displayed bravery and skill in repeatedly returning to the fray in the face of extremely heavy ground fire.”*

After his stint with 101 Sqn, he was posted as Commanding Officer of 9 Sqn, operating the Gnat at Hindon, his second squadron command. Thereafter he commanded FIS for two years and was AOC 16 Wing for another couple of years. Next few years were served in staff appointments at Training Command and AirHQ and in the NDC Course.

AOC Jammu and Kashmir

In early 1987 he was posted as the AOC of J and K where he was called upon to plan an audacious Strike mission

"Lt. Gen Handoo was the Northern Army commander and it was a great pleasure to be working with him as the Air officer in command of J&K. He was operational oriented and later as I reflect, he had nearly the exact idea, that General Musharaf later accomplished in the 1999 Kargil War in the opposite direction. One difference was the Lt. Gen Handoo had a use for Air Power as well in his plan. Having had a background of 101 sqn from the 1971 war and our ability to go deep into enemy territory, I was confident, we could attack uptill Gilgit/ Skardu , should the need arise and get back safely too.

After I took over, Lt. Gen Handoo met me and briefed me about his idea and asked for my opinion. His plan was to attack and occupy Gilgit and the entire northern ridge. A lot many people felt that if we could do this, eventually PoK could also fall subsequently. I was fully supportive and concurred with his plans and offered that since we now have the MiG-25 Foxbat, we can immediately start the Reconnaissance of the area. As I was given the discretion by the AOC-in-C WAC to use the Foxbat as needed, I went ahead and asked for some missions to be carried out. The Army took the mission outcomes and used it to draw out its plans. The IAF was very much part of the plan across different dimensions.

In my view it was a brilliant plan but remained a plan as the political go ahead for it was not given. Lt. General Handoo left after a while but I continued with the reconnaissance missions. However, the proper analysis, records and strategy for the same was not carried forward further."

Author Note: While AVM Banerji was most well known for his participation in the 1965 and 1971 war., much less known is that he was an outstanding instructor and spent considerable time in positions related to flying training. He commanded the flying instructor's school, was the Command Flying Training officer at Training Command and finally retired as the Director of Training at Air Headquarters. It was my hope to have the next interview focus on purely flying training aspects in the IAF during his time, but fate had other ideas. In May 2019, AVM Banerji was diagnosed with Cancer, and he passed away in November. India has lost another air warrior

More on AVM Banerji's career can be read here - <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/Database/4898>

Jaisalmer Diary - The story of 14 C&MU

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

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Written by Air Marshal Minhi S Bawa

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- [Jaisalmer Diary - The story of 14 C&MU](#)
- [5-9th December](#)
- [10th - 17th December](#)
- [Lessons Learnt](#)
- [All Pages](#)

Page 1 of 4

This is an account of the operations at 14 C&MU Jaisalmer. The IAF's victory at Longewala was achieved from Jaisalmer Air Force Base during the 1971 War under the leadership of then Wg Cdr M S Bawa (4494) F(P). This article provides a "War Diary" style narration of the day by day events as they unfolded.

WAR DIARY14 CARE & MAINTENANCE **UNITJAISALMER**

10 Sep 71 - WC Cdr MS BAWA, VM, assumed the charge of Base Commander 14 Care & Maintenance Unit, vice Flt Lt NK SHARMA. The unit still had many Installations under construction and Its offices and sections deployed on peace time basis . This C&MU was called upon to play the role of a MINI WING. The Base Commander who was fully aware of the short—comings of the system started streamlining the new emerging Wing. The task was none too easy as the sections had no Section Commanders. The first and the main objective was to gearup the Wing to the maximum required degree of operational preparedness. The most vital of all these were (a) Ground Defence (b) Air Defence (c) Communication, (d) Radio Aids and (e) the MT. The dynamic lead given by the Base Commander compelled the to forge ahead and soon it was humming with activity. The original strength of personnel which was totally inadequate to accomplish the required task was slowly being Inflated with officers and men of various branches and trades



The men were to be replaced fortnightly to recoupe from the fatigue of this drab and dry town, which had little to offer other than abundance of sand and hot burning air. Faster than men were the stores to arrive. The wagons arrived in large numbers, but there were very few vehicles and personnel to unload them. It was a challenge which had to be met irrespective of the time involved. These essential stores added additional risk, as such had to be dispersed in a planned manner. The vital and vulnerable technical equipment had to be moved to underground complexes. Base Operations room, which had never functioned at this base had to be started from the scratch. The administrative set up and its allied sections had to be moved under tentage. The concealment of these posed a major problem as the terrain offered scanty shrubbery. Regular programme of camouflaging the stores, equipment and tentage was initiated and every morning one hour was devoted to camouflaging, till satisfactory standards were reached. While the Radio and Navigational Aids rose to the occasion, the telephone communication with the rear base lagged far behind and remained unreliable for a long time. The phone call through civil could mature in a minute, while the service line did not respond for hours and days together. The Base Commander in one of the Station gatherings, in order to motivate his men, gave a fiery and belligerent speech, out-lining the purpose of their gathering at this Mini Wing. During his speech, he clearly stated that *"Gentlemen we are here to restore those ten Million people back to their homes , who have been rendered homeless , who are deprived of their self-respect, honour, wives ,children, the near and the dear ones. If you do not react now, the coming generations will hold their heads in shame for lack of action on our part. We have come here to achieve this aim end whatever be the cost, we shall not return without it. I ask you all this, but offer you nothing In return. am more aware of your needs and the sub-standard facilities, but I assure you that I shall make every endeavour to provide you*

what I can, what cannot I shall not hesitate to project to higher authorities.” To Infuse the spirit of dedication the Base Commander summed it up by giving a slogan :
“ SAR FAROSHI KI TAMANNA AB HAMARE DIL MAIN HAIN,DEKHNA HAI KITNA ZOR BAZUA KATIL MEN HAIN”

(We have decided to lay down our lives In pursuit of our aim, now we have to see how much strength the enemy possesses to deny us our AIM. With this in the minds of every—one, there was no requirement for any one to be told as to what is to be done. People worked with a smile from morning to night without complaint)

17 Sep 71 - The Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal PC LAL paid a visit, which was only a week after the Base Cmdr's arrival. He had little to point out, as far as work done was concerned. He paid a visit to the TUBE WELL which was to be inaugurated by him. He expected the water to come up and greet him, but the soil was far from generous. Some more drilling remained to be done and finally the water struck at 905 feet. The Station hummed with activity for a fortnight and the Sections gradually found their places of work. The fortnightly rotation of manpower posed a problem to the Base Cdr as he had to infuse the same spirit in the new arrivals. There was no choice for him but to meet every—one who came new to the Station, to infuse the same spirit to maintain the tempo of work required. While the technical side was getting its due the administrative side was staggering and lagging behind, as there were no reinforcements there. Our dependence on Class IV civilians was never so greatly felt, as they were required to run the essential services such as sanitary and messes .

15 Oct 71 - The long awaited detachment of 122 Sqn comprising of 2 Hunters arrived from AF Station, Jamnagar.

The Ground Defence of the Air Field was the responsibility of 27 Madras Coy Commanded by Major Jaitly.

16 Oct 71 - Without prior intimation to the Base Cdr, 27 Madras Coy was asked to pull out and was replaced by 123 Inf Bn (TA) Coy Commanded by Capt KOCHAR. These sudden changes posed unnecessary and extra work for the Base Cdr.

19 Oct 71- 105 GL Section Type arrived from ATW and established itself next to the operations Room.

20 Oct 71 -12 Air OP Flight was added to the family of 14 Care and Maintenance Unit. GOC 12 Inf Div Maj. General Khambatta, in whose support the Wing was to function, landed at this Base on his way to his forward location.

21 Oct 71 — A troop of 152 AD Regt (L/ 60 guns) headed by Lt ANSARI took complete control of Air Defence at this airfield

22 Oct 71 — The surveillance and Recovery Radar of 15 Wing (P 30 sets) was received which was required to become the eyes and ears of this Base. Its cargo was too large to be handled easily. The operational site for its deployment was already

selected and without losing much time the Radar was deployed. The change from BARELLY to JAISALMER was too much for anyone's liking, however FATE ACCOMPLI had to be accepted by every-one. The poor state of equipment forced the unit to remain non-operational for nine complete days. Besides the local market the resources of JODHPUR had to be tapped to put this equipment on the air in quick time.

23 Oct 71 - The Chief Minister of Rajasthan paid his second visit to the area to apprise himself of the rapid build up of this forward base.

26 Oct 71 - The Chief of the Army Staff, General SFFJ MANTYSHAW paid a short and hurried visit to the area to address all Officers of 12 Inf Div.

31 Oct 71 - The surveillance and recovery Radar came on the air for the first time and maintained watch at scheduled hours.

3 Nov 71 - ADDC at JODHPUR ordered its first ever scramble after sundown at 1801+ hrs, without even ascertaining the night recovery facilities existing at this base. The mission was abandoned after a wild goose chase as the aircraft did not have night Interception capability and were merely asked to return to Base. The Base Commander was aware of such contingencies and he wasted no time in rounding up personnel for a quick lighting up of the runway goose—necks, which were already in position and were being checked every day. To add excitement to the recovery of these aircraft the local Radar reported a hostile track following this mission at 600 Knots. The mission was immediately asked to carry out a hard turn by the Base Commander and maintain altitude (10,000 feet). The hostile track turned out to be spurious pick up by radar. The mission was asked to descend to circuit height. On arrival of the mission the runway was lit, and switched off manually as the mission turned off the runway after landing. This quick and unscheduled lighting of the runway at short notice infused great confidence in the pilots at the Base.

The first joint Air Cooperation exercise "NON PLUS" was conducted.

8 Nov 71 - The Defence Minister Mr. JAGJIVAN accompanied by the Chief Minister of Rajasthan Mr. BARKATULLA KHAN visited the Station and addressed all ranks apprising them of the latest border situations and our operational commitments in the area. He reemphasised his earlier statement that *"This time the battle will be fought on the enemy's soil"*

18 Nov 71 - The second Joint Army Air Cooperation exercise "SKY HAWK" was conducted, successfully.

28 Nov 71 - The Prime Minister Shrimati INDIRA GANDHI visited the area and had a brief chat with the Base Cdr.

On the heels of the Prime Minister arrived the Chief of the Air Staff. He also took the opportunity of addressing all ranks and apprised them of the latest situation. He emphasised that a high degree of preparedness was to be maintained, as the enemy was likely to resort to a pre-emptive strike at any time. The initiative lied with him, how long and when he would resort to it, only the history would tell. However he minced no words to state that *"He would like, If the war came, a short, crisp and a decisive battle."* He wished all, GOOD LUCK.

2 Dec 71 — Quite unmindful of the prevailing situation on our borders, arrived the Air Headquarters Team, headed by Air Cdre VM BHATNAGAR, to assess the requirements and make fresh recommendations for the establishment of a CARE AND MAINTENANCE UNIT. The Base Cdr in his opening address highlighted the role of these forward bases during operations and strongly recommended that these be turned into full time Mini Wings with full manpower, communication, MT and associated facilities. This he said, would yield dividends during operations. The Impressions gained after the conference were that this revision was more likely to be downwards than wards

3 Dec 71 - At about 1800 hrs besides the normal happenings of the day came the flash call from Air Cdr KANWAR SINGH AOC RAJASTHAN informing PAKISTAN'S pre-emptive strikes on our airfields, followed by a Command call and a Radio announcement. This Station was already geared up and was expecting such a pre-emptive strike to take place any time between the 2nd and with of December. All actions were initiated and available forces asked to standby and undertake offensive actions on receipt of word "SANSAR"

The day light had already gild past when the word "SANSAR" was received. The receipt of the word was promptly acknowledged. Total black out measures were already inforce for the last 15 days. The Ground Defence and the Air Defence were more than alert. The night was spent in waiting but the enemy did not show up.

4 Dec 71 — The Station launched five command task missions (2 aircraft each) on targets such as JACOBABAD AIR FIELD, RAHIMYARKHAN SU and AIR FIELD. In addition close support sorties were carried out In the area where 12 Inf Div was supposed to launch an offensive enabling them to capture SAKHIREWALA and ISLAMGARH.

When 12 Inf Div was concentrating on their area of advance towards RAHIMYAR KHAN, the enemy sneaked in with one Regt of Armour and one Bde strength troops from GHABBAR Via BP 638 towards LAUNGEWALA. The leading column of tanks by—passed LAUNGEWALA post and was seen advancing towards RAMGARH, past midnight. This suspected movement, as identification was not possible, was passed by the Coy Cdr at LAUNGEWALA to the HQ. This did cause

certain doubts in the Div HQ, but the same appeared to be discarded. The column of tanks decided to turn about a few k.m. short of RAMGARH, when they found their rear not catching up. This was the first fatal mistake committed by the enemy which subsequently changed the course of war. Had these tanks carried on, they would have easily overrun RAMGARH, as there were no defences whatsoever. Return of these leading tanks towards LAUNGEWALA and the noise of more tanks rolling in compelled the Coy Cdr to apprise GOC 12 Inf Div again. On receipt of this message the GOC tried to get through to the Base Cdr, but to his surprise he found that the MUJAHIDS had already cut the telephone line at RAMGARH. This confirmed his doubts about the enemy Armour thrust at LAUNGEWALA. The radio relay link was established between the GOC and Base Cdr in the early hours of 5 Dec 71, wherein he described suspected Armour thrust at LAUNGEWALA and wanted him to investigate.

Total Sorties - 20

Claims made - Enemy Op and Bunkers hit ,
130 Camels killed.

Ammunition expended — 30 MM HE 3000 Rds

age 2 of 4

5 Dec 71 - On receipt of report regarding suspected movement of Armour the Base Cdr ordered missions to standby for TACR at first light. Air Op was also cautioned to carry out reconnaissance in the area and render any assistance required by the Hunters. The repeated telephone calls from the GOC 12 Inf Div left no doubt in the mind of Base Cdr about the helplessness of the Army in the LAUNGEWALA area, due to their scanty deployment and the pre occupation of Div with their much planned advance towards RAHIMYARKHAN.

LAUNGEWALA post having come under increasing enemy pressure made frantic calls for help from Div HQ. Div HQ had no options but to depend on the AIR FORCE to save the day. At about 0715 hours when the post was about to be overrun, the first Hunter mission arrived at the scene scanning the road from RAMGARH to LAUNGEWALA. The mission immediately reported the presence of T-59 tanks, confirmed also by the Air Op. The mission lost no time in engaging the tanks advancing towards the LAUNGEWALA post. The transmission of the Hunter missions were being monitored by the Base Cdr, who ordered the subsequent strikes without any delay. Missions were launched one behind the other in quick succession to beat and destroy the enemy's armoured thrust.

This turned out to be a clean battle, one of its kind, between PAKISTAN armour and the INDIAN AIR FORCE. Never in the history before, a more decisive battle has ever been fought between the AIR alone vs. the ARMOUR as was done at LAUNGEWALA.

With a total of Four Hunter aircraft available at the disposal of the Base Cdr, the Base was able to launch 17 sorties destroying of the enemy's armour. The tanks were seen ablaze as reported by the Air Op and Coy at LAUNGEWALA.

An enemy Intercept by our Army In the evening revealed the sagging morale of the PAKISTAN ARMOUR indicating casualties In men and material and SOS call for close Air Support, without which armour advance considered ompossible, which is reproduced below :

“HAWAI NE NAK ME DAM KAR HAI HAWAI JAHAZ JATA HAI AUR DOOSRA ATTA BEES OOPER NACHTA HAI CHALIS FISADI FAUJ AND SAMAN HALLAK AUR TABAH HO CHUKA HAI AGHE JANA TO KEYA PECEE MURRNA BE MUSHKAL HO GAYA HAI JALDI HAWAI FAUJ MADAD KE LIYE BEJO WARNA VAPAS MURRNA NA MUMKIN HAI”

Total sorties - 17

Claims made - Destroyed 15 tanks, 1 Armour Recee vehicle and 7 Trains. Damaged 23 Tanks .

**Ammunition Expended : 30 MM HE -4000 Rds
Rocket T-10-180.**

At the fall of the day the following message was received from GOC 12 Inf Div Maj RF KHAMBATTA :

From : 12 Inf Div Main
To : 14 C&MU
Info : AOC Raj

DTN : 052130
o - 2030

PERSONAL FOR WC CDR BAWA FROM GOC (.) HAVE FNCCELNT CO-
OPTIATION AND SUPPORT TODAY (.) SHOOTING BY YOUR BOYS MOST
ACCURATE RESULTING IN DESTROYING NUMNER OF ENEMY TANKS
AND BLUNTING HIS ATTACK (.) PLEASE CONVEY MU APPRECIATION
AND THAT OF MY TROOPS TO PILOTS (.) CONGRATULATIONS ON
EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE (.)//

When the enemy was busy attacking other airfields In the Western Sector JAISALMER lay waiting for the second night with its Air Defence elements on the highest alert.

6 Dec 71 — At about 0130 hrs the Div Cdr informed the Base Cdr, that "Since you are hurting the enemy most and if he has a determined Cdr, It is likely that he attempt a thrust with a Sqn of tanks to neutralise the air field". He apprised the Base Cdr the route enemy was likely to follow and said that this was his personal appreciation and expressed his inability to offer anything to counter this thrust. The Base Cdr coolly inquired as to "What would you like me to do?" On this he advised the Base Cdr to keep some listening posts to hear the noise of advancing tanks, if any. To which the

Base Cdr quickly retorted" "What do you expect me to do next and surely you do not want me to quit." However the morale of the Station was high and the Base Cdr was not one bit perturbed about this imaginary armour threat. - The Anti Aircraft Guns were asked to standby for any short notice deployment for countering the armour threat, if at all it developed at night.

The much awaited BOMBER RAID at night was reported heading towards JAISALMER by Army at about 0440 hrs. Since the guns were already free and on high alert, the Base Cdr just stood at CAP controller position standing by to give orders for the guns to fire. On hearing the noise of the approaching aircraft engine's (piston) the guns were ordered to open fire.

The aircraft made a hasty retreat by putting on a sharp bank and off-loading all its weapon load of BOMBS (31 In number) just outside the perimeter. One of the Bombs hit the under-ground power cable and a telephone pole, thus disrupting the much needed telephone communication and main power generations. The station had to revert to stand-by power supply, and cope with no telephone facility for the next six hours.

The Base Cdr ordered the first light TAC-R on all routes leading into JAISALMER to dispel any doubt of the armoured thrust attempting to capture the airfield. These TAC-Rs revealed no sign of armour and the Comd missions kept in pending, the Base mounted pressure once again at LATJNGLVALA. The tanks were picked up one by one and were hit repeatedly till they started to burn. By the evening nearly 37 tanks lay burning/damaged and scattered In this belt of THAR desert. The battle of IAUNGEWÆALA infact was over. LAUNGEWALA in JAISALMER district of Rajasthan became the biggest graveyard of PAKISTAN Armour. As was expected PAKISTAN met its waterloo. This was because the Air Force took timely and decisive action before the thrust could assume menacing proportion. Emboldened by their experience of 1965 War, Pakistan mounted one of its biggest offensives on our positions at LAUNGEWALA with a fleet of about 45 tanks. With such a massive striking power at their disposal PAKISTANI's thought that they would get an easy walkover to the GOLDEN CITY OF JAISALMER. The victory here could help PAKISTAN to shield its setbacks on other fronts. The Battle of LAUNGEWALA villiage thus be remembered, not only by our people for the victory achieved by our AIR FORCE but also by the PAKISTANI ARMOUR for the defeat suffered by them in this THAR desert out-post.

Total sorties - 18

Claims made - Destroyed 3 Tanks, 12 vehicles

Damaged — 6 Tanks

Ammunition expended - 30 mm HE 2690 Rds

Rocket T-10-102.

7 Dec 71 - A message was received from the Army at about 0420 hrs about the approaching Low level Bomber Raid. The Base Cdr. once again ordered the(SOP) to engage the aircraft, but the' aircraft managed to slip through the barrage of fire at very low height flying along the taxi-track. This raid caused a minor damage to the taxi-track which was quickly repaired the next day. The gunners claimed that they had hit the aircraft but no signs of wreckage were spotted either from the ground or air. The kill was not granted to the gunners.

During the day the Base launched 20 Hunter sorties , pounding the area between LAUNGEWALA, BP 638 and GHABBAR, depriving the enemy of its much needed vehicles and guns which lay burning. These facilitated our pilots in navigating to the area. During the first mission of the day and very first mission of Wing Commander CONQUEST OC 122 Sqn from JAISALMER, while engaging the enemy tank he sustained bullet Injury on his foot from one of the small arms fired by the enemy. He safely brought the aircraft to Base. He was immediately evacuated to and the injury declared as minor.

At about 1900 hrs. the MUJAHID movement was suspected behind the Bomb dumps. Due to darkness no visual contact could be made, however foot noises were heard and on this the Ground Defence opened up. The firing lasted for about 5 minutes, the MUJAHIDS hastily withdrew leaving behind two dead camels

Total sorties - 22

Claims made - Destroyed 5 Goods Wagons ,

3 Tanks, 5 Artillery guns ,

28 vehicles and one oil tanker.

Damaged 1 Factory and 1 Tank.

Ammunition expended - 30 mm HE — 2233 Rds

Rocket - T-10-109.

8 Dec 71 - The Station launched a total of 14 sorties in pursuit of its aim to destroy the enemy.

Total sorties - 14

Claims made - Destroyed 4 Goods Wagons ,

16 vehicles and 1 Tank,

Damaged 1 Diesel engine of Train,

1 Gas plant, 1 Railway Shed, 1 Goods Train and 1 Tank.

Ammunition expended - 30 HE 11+32 Rds

Rocket T-10-76.

At about midday a flash message from the Chief of the Air Staff received. The message and the reply by the Base Cdr is reproduced below : —

From : Air HQ NEW DELHI

To : AF Stn JAISALMER

FOR OC FROM CAS (.) PLEASE CONVEY MY CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKS TO OFFICERS AND MEN OF 122 SQN (OTU) FOR THEIR MAGNIFICENT PERFORMANCE YESTERDAY WHEN THEY VIRTUALLY WIPE OUT A REGIMENT OF T-59 TANKS NEAR LAUNGEWALA (.) THE DEFENCE MINISTER CMA THE ARMY CHIEF AND GENERAL BEWOOR ALL JOIN ME IN CONVEYING THEM OUR BEST WISHES FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS (.) /////

From : 14 C&M U

To : AIR HQ (VB)

FOR CAS FROM BASE COMMANDER (.) REF YOUR AM/09/DEC/06 THANKS FOR THE KIND APPRECIATION (.) MORALE IS VERY HIGH (.) /////

Since the force was supplemented with additional aircraft from JAMNAGAR raising the total force to 14 Hunter aircraft, the Base Cdr found the inadequate utilisation of this force and flashed a message to TAC Comdr 7 TAC Gp capt MM. ARORA, the text of the message is reproduced below :

From : 14 C&M U

To : 7 TAC

ARORA FRCM MINI (.) NOT BEING UTILIZED FULLY (.) REQUEST MORE UTILIZATION (.)

9 Dec 71 — The Station launched a total of 22 Hunter sorties and 2 casualty evacuations by Mi-4.

Total sorties - 24

Claims made - Destroyed 9 Tanks,

3 Artillery Guns, 32 Vehicles,

1	Armour	personnel	Carrier,	and
1	Artillery	ammunition		dump.

Damaged 3 Tanks and 6 vehicles.

Ammunition expended - 30 mm HE 2556 Rdg

Rocket T-10-109.

Again at about midday a message was received from AOC-in-C Western Air command Air Marshal MM Engineer text of which and the reply sent by the Base Cdr is reproduced below —

FROM : WAC

TO : 14 C&MU

TO OC FROM AOC-IN-C. (.) THE ARMY CDR SOUTHERN COMMAND TELEPHONED ME TO CONVEY HIS THANKS FOR THE EXCELLENT WORK DONE BY OUR PILOTS IN RAJASTHAN SECTOR (.) I AM HAPPY TO NOTE THE AGGRESSIVE SPIRIT WITH WHICH THEY HAVE CARRIED OUT THE ATTACKS AGAINST THE ENEMY ARMOUR AND LINES OF COMMUNICATION (.) PLEASE CONVEY MY APPRECIATION TO ALL SQUADRONS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THESE STRIKES (.)////

OPS IMM

From : 14 C&M U

To : WAC

AOC-IN-C FROM BASE COMMANDER (.) REFER YOUR AOM/08 DEC/08 THANKS FOR THE KIND APPRECIATION (.) MORALE IS VERY HIGH (.)

The MUJAHIDS in their attempt to neutralise the targets at the AIRFIELD tried to sneak In from the NORTH WESTERN side. They met again with hot reception of bullets and made a hasty retreat again leaving behind two dead Camels.

- - Page 3 of 4
 -
 - **10 Dec 71** - The Station pumped in 8 Hunter softies on the heels of the enemy who was fast dwindling, which is quite evident from the number of sorties launched. In addition 2 Casualty evacuation sortis were again launched.
 - **Total sorties** – 10
 - **Claims made** - Destroyed 1 Artillery Gun,
 - 14 Vehicles and 1 Tank,
 - 4 vehicles and 2 trains.
 - **Ammunition expended** - 30 mm HE 878 Rds
 - Rocket T-10-72.

-
- **11 Dec 71** — In view of the inadequate targets available in our sector, the station was asked to support 11 Inf Div in NAYA CHCR Sector. The Station launched a total of 14 fighter and 5 Casualty evacuation sorties.
- **Total sorties** - 14
- **Claims made** - Destroyed 3 Goods Trains carrying explosives and Ammunitions
- **Ammunition expended** - 30 mm HE 40 Rds
- Rockets T-10-48
-
- **12 Dec 71** — The enemy bomber visited again at about 0230 hrs, but was unable to lob any bombs inside the perimeter of the airfield. The Air Defence again pumped in few rounds to scare the enemy away.
- The Hunters carried out 10 sorties in the 11 Inf. Sector destroying targets of opportunity in support of ground troops. In addition to this 4 casualty evacuation sorties were also carried out.
- **Total sorties** - 14
- **Claims made** - Destroyed 3 Goods trains ,
- 2 godowns and 11 wagons carrying ammunition.
- **Ammunition Expended** – 30 MM HE -687 Rds
- Rocket - T-10-77.
-
- **13 Dec 71** — The Station again mounted pressure sorties in 11 Inf Div and 12 Inf Div sector in pursuit, of enemy which was hard to find set ablaze.
- **Total sorties** - 11
- **Claims made** - Destroyed 4 tanks, 2 Goods trains and 12 Goods Wagons
- Damaged 1 Tank, 2 Diesel Engines of Trains, 2 Goods Trains
- And 1 Petro Chemical Factory.
- **Ammunition Expended** – 30 MM HE -1502 Rds
- Rocket - T-10-67.

14 DEC 71 - Once again the Station launched 12 Hunter sorties to enable 12 Inf Div to gather. courage to make head-way into the enemy territory in pursuit of their AIM to capture RAHIMYAR KHAN. The Base Cdr. apprised the GOC 12 Inf that there was no enemy visible in their area of likely advance and there was not likely to be any resistance till RAHIMYAR KHAN. The Base Cdr. even offered to take him personally or any of his Bde Comdr/Col GS in a Hunter trainer with a fighter cover to enable him to assess the situation and force on towards RAHIMYAR KHAN. No encouraging reply was received, which only showed the reluctance to move forward

and an added excuse that one of his Bde was moved into II Inf Div Sector. Historians will ask at a later date as to why 12 Inf Div was depleted of its forces when the enemy was completely destroyed opposite them and RAHIMYAR KHAN was within easy reach with complete situation In their favour.

Total sorties - 12

Claims made - Destroyed — 100 Goods Wagons and fuel tankers
Damaged Goods Wagons and 1 railway building.

Ammunition expended – 30 MM HE - 1812 rds.
Rocket - T-10-47

15 DEC 71 - The Station mounted pressure along RAHIMYAR KHAN – ROHRI axis and NAYACHOR area to enable 12 Inf Div and 11 Inf Div to move forward and capture maximum territory in view of imminent fall of DACCA and subsequent likely CEASE FIRE in this area.

12 Inf Div Sector had complete air superiority right from the first day and now with the enemy's armour destroyed and due to complete rout In his rear as nothing was allowed to move. The Base Cdr expected 12 Inf Div to make a definite headway making a wedge deep Into the enemy territory but the progress on the ground appeared to be hardly any. It appeared that there was no will to do so.

During the course of the day a train carrying full Sqn of Armour was intercepted near KHAIRPUR. Large number of tanks and their ammunition and personnel were hit. For the first time the Hunters saw Air opposition in NAYACHOR areas and two MIG -19s were compelled to go into the ground In the last ditch maneuvers

About an hour before sundown there came a Flash message from COC 12 Inf Div informing about two STARFIGHTERS (104s) seen heading towards JAISAIMER. Since the Base had seen no aerial combat so for the Base Cdr immediately had six Hunter aircraft in air to welcome the STAR FIGHTER but to his dismay no STAR FIGHTER showed up and he sent a message in reply to GOCs message – “Thank you for the Information. Reception Committee of six hunters disappointed”

Total sorties - 21

Claims made — Destroyed 6 Tanks, 3 Goods Trains, 21 Goods wagons .
1 Diesel engine, 15 Vehicles and 2 aircrafts. Damaged
1 tank, 26 Goods Wagons and 1 Goods Train.

Ammunition expended – 30 mm HE-2099 rds.
Rocket T-10-93

16 DEC 71 - The Base Cdr passed a message in the morning to all unit/section Comdrs that "He presents Bangala Desh to the nation on the eve of his Birth Day" and thanked all for showing grim determination to repel the enemy from our soil" The BANGLA DESH in actual fact fell at 1631 hrs. the same day and stalling of the events by the BASE CDR came true.

10 more Hunter sorties were launched with one Bombing raid at RETI JN. Due to the unreliability of the EMRU's Bombing and NEPALM raids, though much desired by the Base Cdr, were not launched for fear of hang up. In addition to this one casualty evacuation sortie was also undertaken.

Our beloved Prime Minister Smt INDIRA GANDHI announced that unilateral ceasefire was to be observed from 2000 hrs 17 Dec 71. This was followed by a message from AOC—1n-C Western Air Command asking all AOCs/Stn Cdrs/Base Cdrs to cease all Offensive action after 2000 hrs 17 Dec 71 and authorised Base Cdrs to take any retaliatory action in self defence required under intimation to him.

Total Sorties - 11

Claims made - Destroyed 7 vehicles , 1 RcL Gun and 10 Goods Wagons .

Damaged 1 Mil Spl Train and 4 Goods Trains.

Ammunition Expended - 30 mm HE-1459 - Rds

Rocket T-10-58

Bombs	-	1000	Lbs	-2.
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17 Dec 71 — Since this was the last day of the war and the cease fire was to come into force from 2000 hrs , the Base once again hammered at all enemy positions opposite 12 Inf Div and 11 Inf DIV area by launching 14 Hunter sorties .

Total sorties - 14

Claims made - Destroyed 46 Wagons , 16 Vehicles

1 Train Engine and 14 Artillery Guns

Ammunition expended - 30 mm HE-1850 Rds.

Rocket T-10-28.

The ceasefire was accepted by PAKISTAN after this short, crisp and decisive encounter INDIA. PAKISTAN never expected even in his wildest dreams that he would have to suffer humiliation. at the hands of Indians.

• **POINTS TO BE EXAMINED**

1. NIGHT RAIDS -This Station had no night interception capability. L/ 70 Anti Aircraft Guns were not available. Enemy attempted a total of 11 night raids (3 low level and 8 high level). All

low level raids met with hot, reception from L/60 guns. On high level raids no fire was opened in order to conceal location. A very negligible damage was caused by low level raids.

2. GROUND DEFENCES - The domestic area had no ground defence element and had to be arranged locally through personal liaison.
3. FORCE AVAILABILITY - Inadequate force was made available to the Station till 7 Dec 71. Had the enemy mounted day light raids and provided air cover for his advancing Amour, perhaps the course of battle in this sector would have been different.
4. MANPOWER AND EQUIPMENT – Inadequate man—power and equipment was available due to Sqn's double commitments at JAMNAGAR AND JAISAILMER and second line facility at JAMNAGAR. The man-power had to be supplemented on the spot by releasing unskilled BORDER ROAD Labours to help the Armament Trade to cope up with pressure of work.
5. WEAPONS - The Station mostly used HC-T-10 Rockets and 30 mm HE Bullets. On examination of the destroyed tanks it was revealed that the 30 mm caused maximum damage and was solely responsible for setting the tanks on fire. The T 59 tanks carried extra barrel of fuel and fuel in their tanks which was easily exposed to the front gun fire. A sequence belting with SAP/HE/Incendiary bullets be examined.
6. BASE ACTIVATION - Activation of these C&MU's and MEMU's in the absence of their turning into regular MINI WINGS be more closely examined. Where heterogeneous man power from all over is to be pumped in, allied facilities, in regard to class IV be kept in mind. In view of security and discipline on these forward bases no civilians Class IV be routed, only NC'sE be thought of.

On imminence of hostilities automatic grants/ sanctions for operating Officers and SNCOs messes be given to prevent any initial hardship and unnecessary paper work.

7. COUNTER AIR MISSIONS - Two aircraft strikes at airfields are considered tactically unsound. The strikes should be not less than four aircraft and if the rockets are to be carried an escort be thought of, as the rocket launchers seriously impare the fighting capability of the aircraft.

TOTAL EFFORTS, AMN AND DAMAGES ENEMY AND OWN AT A GLANCE

Total No. of sorties - 222

Total Qty. of Amn Exp - 30 mm HE - 26238 Rds.

.....Rocket T-10-1196

.....Bombs 1000 Lbs - 2

Own Losses - NIL

Enemy Losses - Destroyed: -

.....41					Tanks
.....2					Aircraft
.....126					Vehicles
.....13		Arty			Guns
.....1		RCL			gun
.....18		Goods			Trains
.....190		Goods			Wagons
.....2		Railway			Engines
.....2					Godowns
.....10		Oil			Tankers
.....2		Ammunition			dumps
.....130	Camels.				
Enemy Damages - 37 Tanks					
.....10					Vehicles
.....10		Goods			Trains
.....1		Mil		Spl	Train
.....4		Train			Engines
.....34		Goods			Wagons
.....3	Factories				

AWARDS**&****DECORATION**

SI <u>No.</u>	Service <u>No.</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name & Initials</u>	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Decorations/</u>
			<u>Award Earned</u>		
•	4494 WG CDR	MS BAWA, WM	14 C&MU	AVSM	
•	4340 WG CDR	MN SINGH	“	M-in-D	
•	4692 WG CDR	DM CONQUEST	122 SQN	AVSM, VrC	
•	IC-7470 MAJOR	ATMA SINGH	12 A O P	VrC	
•	5059 SQN LDR	RN BALI	122 SQN	VrC	
•	5270 SQN LDR	SDL TULLY	122 SQN	M-in-D	
•	4956 SQN LDR	FJ MEHTA	“	VrC	
•	5008 SQN LDR	GV HINGORANI	“	M-in-D	
•	5783 SQN LDR	JAGBIR SINGH	“	VrC	
•	6334 SQN LDR	DK DASS	“	VrC	
•	IC-15466 CAPT	D MATHUR	12 A O P	M-in-D	
•	IC-22304 CAPT	KC SHARMA	105 GLSEL	SM	
•	6742 FLT LT	KS SURESH	122 SQN	VrC	
•	IC-16285 CAPT	PPS SANGHA	12 A O P	VrC	

- | | | | |
|---------------|------------------|----------|--------|
| • 8991 FLT LT | D YADAV | “ | M-in-D |
| • 8392 FLT LT | G KAPUR | “ | M-in-D |
| • 9447 FLT LT | R GOSAIN | “ | VrC |
| • 8378 FLT LT | MP PREMI | HTS | VrC |
| • 14884 WO | GOSWAMI | 122 SQN | M-in-D |
| • 213462 SGT | HARIHARAN | 12 A O P | M-in-D |
| • 231205 CPL | VALADHANDAYUTHAN | “ | M-in-D |
| • 247447 CPL | PILLAI BP | “ | M-in-D |

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The saving of Chander

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Friday, 08 February 2019 03:19

Written by AVM C V Parker (Retd)

Hits: 4403

In this short piece, Air Vice Marshal C V Parker MVC VM ([4346](#) F(P)) narrates the last mission of his squadron - No.20 "Lightnings" - that could not beat the ceasefire clock!

December of every year takes me back to 1971 and the Indo-Pak war. I was then a wing commander in command of No. 20 Squadron AF equipped with Hunter MK 56A aircraft (ac) based at Pathankot, and tasked primarily with counter air operations. My pilots log book reminds me of the sorties I personally led attacking PAF air bases at Peshawar, Mianwali, Murid, Chaklala, the Attock Oil Refinery plus close air support in Chhamb and Poonch sectors.

To this list should have been added the PAF forward airfield at Chander; this anecdote will relate a little known story.

In the first week of Dec 71, Air Cmde LM Katre who had been sent to control air operations at Pathankot, asked Wg Cdr Johnny Greene the CO of No 2 Squadron with a Gnat ac dett at Amritsar, and myself to a confidential briefing in his office. He had been informed that the PAF airfield at Chander had to be neutralized on a date and a time to be notified by higher authorities. My squadron had been tasked to bomb the runway at Chander with eight ac each carrying 2 x 1000 lb penetration bombs.

Tactically, in the relatively short distance to Chander, we were required to climb to 10,000 ft, drop speed, get into line-astern about 1000 yds apart and deliver the bombs in a steep dive along the length of the runway. Since we would be highly vulnerable, four Gnat ac would give us top cover from Amritsar, which I would overfly en route the target and cover us for four minutes over Chander before they would have to return to their base. For security purposes this plan was referred to as Mission 548 and restricted to a few need-to-know individuals.

Johnny and I carried out a mutual briefing covering communication, codes, tactics and I assured him that I would be over Amritsar 15 minutes before TOT (Time on Target). Midway through the second week we received the date and TOT (1630) for Mission 548 which gave my ground staff just enough time to provide 8 (+ 1 standby) ac armed as required. I had obtained some very basic intelligence on the target (R/W orientation, elevation, layout etc) but I had a good professional team both in the air and on the ground.

As we taxied out and neared our own R/W at 1600 hrs, I asked for stream take-off in pairs but was told abruptly to 'Hold position'. I was deeply concerned as we had nine aircraft sitting on the taxi track though two local Gnat ac were capping the airfield for our take-off. Then came an authoritative voice on the radio, '*Cecil, Katre here, return to your dispersal where I will be waiting for you*'.

We taxied back rapidly and over a cup of tea he explained that he had just received a flash message to say that high level cease-fire talks were in progress and meanwhile no offensive actions across the border were to take place after 1600 hrs.

In his book 'In the Ring and Standing' Air Cmde Kaiser Tufail of the PAF paid a compliment to No. 20 Squadron with particular reference to our strike on Murid on 08 Dec 71 where the PAF lost five ac on the ground. Though our RV (rendezvous) with the Gnats over Amritsar never took place, on the suggestion of my pilots soon after the war, we, along with our families, drove down to Amritsar, made our obeisance at the Golden Temple and gave thanks, though tinged with some regret at the last minute cancellation of Mission 548 which saved Chander.

Postscript.

After I had completed my squadron briefing for Mission 548 and was leaving the room, I heard the persuasive voice of 'Lightning 9' (the standby pilot with a sense of humour but now sadly no more) offer a bottle of whisky to anyone who had to 'fall out'! A little later all eight of us had to 'fall out'; he promptly disappeared into hiding!

Old soldiers look after old comrades : P D Jeyasingh

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Wednesday, 26 December 2018 13:58

Written by K S Nair

Hits: 4389



Air Cmde PD 'Jeya' Jeyasingh [10923 F\(N\)](#) passed away at 2330 hrs on 18 Oct 2018 at the Command Hospital Air Force Bangalore. He was admitted on 05 October after being diagnosed with pneumonia and other complications. He was veteran of the 1971 war, who flew on bombing sorties with the Canberra bombers. He was also known as an old comrade who refuses to let the nation forget about his comrades. **K S Nair** writes about the annual commemoration that Air Commodore Jeyasingh started - and which continues today even in his absence.

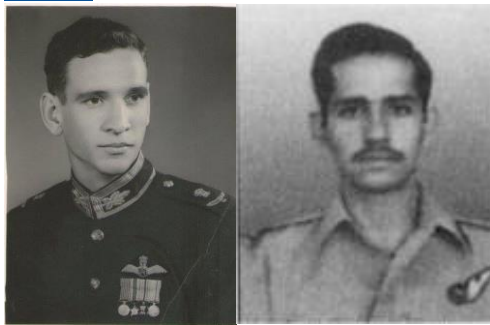
Late in October this year I wrote an obituary to Air Commodore Daniel Jeyasingh, a distinguished IAF navigator and veteran of the 1971 war. Some of those who knew him have asked me to supplement that obituary with an account of something he took on in the year or so following the war. A simple story, it involves no public glory or benefit to him, but says much about the kind of man he was – and the kind of institution the Indian armed forces are.

The War

For two years before the 1971 war, and for nearly four years after (an extraordinarily long tenure in a single unit), Daniel Jeyasingh served with No 16 Squadron of the

IAF, flying Canberra bomber-interdictors. During the 1971 war the squadron, led from the front by its already legendary CO Wing Commander P Gautam, rendered spectacular service, flying over 70 sorties within the first six days of the war, striking targets in both the Eastern and the Western theatres by both day and night, and adding to the stories around and decorations worn by its personnel. Jeyasingh himself flew over a dozen sorties during the war.

On 15th December, the last day of fighting in the Eastern Sector, less than an hour before the ceasefire announced by then-General Manekshaw, the squadron lost one Canberra and its crew, Flight Lieutenant [Brian Wilson](#) and Flight Lieutenant [Rohinton Mehta](#), over Kurmitola Cantonment in East Pakistan.



All wartime losses are tragic but there was much that was particularly poignant about this particular loss. After hostilities ended, Wg Cdr Gautam pressed for an IAF team to go to Bangladesh, and exhume the crew's remains, which had been buried with care by grateful Bangladeshis. They were cremated, and the ashes brought back in two urns, by hand of an officer, to the squadron. Jeyasingh, by then the adjutant of the squadron, took custody of the ashes.

Wg Cdr Gautam then took it on himself to ensure that benefits were settled in favour of the next-of-kin. Tragedies notwithstanding, Flt Lt Wilson's benefits were settled in relatively quick time and straightforward manner. Wilson had got married in 1970, and had had a baby girl just before the war broke out. Wilson's father was himself a Colonel, and his father-in-law a professor in Jodhpur. Between them the family organised an appropriate burial of his ashes. Jeyasingh and another officer represented the unit at the funeral. And the squadron's duty to one of its fallen members was done.

Flt Lt Mehta's case, however, was more of a challenge. He was single, and his aged parents would simply not accept that their son was no more. The first telegram to them after the loss had said, as was usually the case if death had not been confirmed, that Mehta was Missing in Action, and they clung to that wording.

Wg Cdr Gautam himself, although posted away from the squadron by then, visited Mehta's parents, to try and convince them. The squadron had hoped to bury Mehta's ashes in his parents' home town of Hyderabad, but even Wg Cdr Gautam could not persuade them. He himself was lost in a MiG-21 accident in late 1972. And there matters lay for some time.

Laid to Rest

The urn containing Mehta's ashes remained with Jeyasingh, in his capacity as squadron adjutant, for what he describes as "a long long time." And then, Mehta's sister visited, from the UK. Following long discussions with Jeyasingh, she authorised him to bury Mehta's ashes where the squadron was based – in Gorakhpur.

The nearest Parsi Tower of Silence was in Lucknow. But Mehta's sister told Flt Lt Jeyasingh, "*My memory of my brother is Gorakhpur, I want it in Gorakhpur.*"

So the squadron approached a local church for a burial plot. It was not straightforward, as Mehta was not a Christian, but eventually Flt Lt Jeyasingh persuaded them to agree – or, by some accounts, to turn a blind eye while the burial was done by the squadron.

And so it is that the ashes of Flight Lieutenant Rohinton Mehta, were buried in a gravesite in a church in Gorakhpur, and the location is marked by a marble plaque. The site remains there. And fittingly, every year, No 16 Squadron Indian Air Force, now flying SEPECAT Jaguars, still conducts a memorial for Flight Lieutenants Wilson and Mehta, at the site.

In 2009, the long-retired Air Commodore Jeyasingh told me, "Till two years back, every year, 15th of December, I used to go. ... After coming to Bangalore, I have been a little lazy. But - the squadron does the honours. 15th of December. [Sometimes] they need to be reminded." He laughs.

And he adds, tellingly, "In fact - the Air Force was also very kind. When I was in the squadron, they used to give me an aeroplane. Training, Cross-Country. Go to Gorakhpur, ... do this. As long as I was in flying units. [Even when I was in] AEB ...

Subsequently when I was on the ground, I used to ask my Boss and - most times, the moment the reason is explained, Boss will say, Go on duty. So I used to go.

In between, when I went to Delhi - not on that particular day, but whenever I went to Delhi, I used to just hop across to - it's overnight - I used to, I still went. ... But most certainly, as long as the squadron is there, and as long as the Air Force is there, they will do the honours on 15th of December.”

And indeed, as far as we know, every year on the 15th of December, one fateful day before Vijay Diwas, No 16 Squadron of the Indian Air Force – and indeed, Air Force Station Gorakhpur – organise a small ceremony to remember two brothers-in-arms who gave their lives in one of the century’s last just wars.

Ejected over No Man's Land!

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Saturday, 22 December 2018 16:40

Written by Gp Capt Gurdeep Singh (Retd)

Hits: 6196

Gp Capt Gurdeep Singh Samra [8695 F\(P\)](#) was a young Flight Lieutenant with No.101 Squadron operating from Adampur. He narrates the harrowing tale of ejecting over No-Mans land in the Chamb sector - and enduring severe injuries. He would later be rescued by Indian Army troops and underwent a full recovery back to flying fit status for a fruitful and rewarding career in the IAF.

The Prelude

I was commissioned on 1st August 1964 as a part of 89/90th Pilots course at then No



2 JTW (JET TRAINING WING) Mohamadabad, BIDAR. After having stint at Kalaikunda (Vampire FB 52, 221 Squadron) , Hasimara (16 Wing - Toofanis, 4 Squadron) and Ambala (7 Wing, Mystere IVA, 8 Squadron), I was posted

to 26 Squadron AF, at 8 Wing AF Adampur on induction of Sukhoi-7 aircraft on 5 May 1968. After about six months I was posted to 101 Squadron AF at the same base when it converted to Sukhoi-7s. I stayed put in 101 Squadron from 29 Oct 1968 To 26 Jan 1971 (As a young Fg Offr to Flt Lt) when I was selected to undergo APQFI (ALL PURPOSE QUALIFIED FLYING INSTRUCTOR) - course at Air Force Station Tambaram. By this time I had besides attaining fully operational day and night status , also flown almost 400 hrs on S-22 aircraft (The Sukhoi-7 was frequently referred to as S-22 or Type S-22).

Having finished the course successfully in July 1971, I was posted to Air Force Academy, Dundigal, where I started the training on Harvard aircraft with, most probably the 108 Pilot's course. When I had gone for APQFI course I was already engaged and decided to get married now. As hindsight perhaps it was not the right time but destiny decided it that way - Who can go against destiny? Against all odds I was granted leave and went to SHIMLA where my parents had settled and got married on 27 Sep 71 at Ferozepore Cantt.

We all know what was happening since Feb 71 that year. As things started heating up the IAF swung into action. They decided to augment the pilot strength in all Fighter Sqns. Hence training institutions were instructed to part with the fighter pilots and manage training with balance of transport and helicopter pilots. After getting married, I remember getting a telegram : "Leave cancelled- join duty immediately".

I managed to arrive back on duty on 9 Oct 71 leaving newly wed wife Maninder Kaur, a young girl , at Shimla, getting the first shock and taste of IAF life. We were told to keep our luggage packed and be ready to leave at short notice. And one fine day 19 Oct 71 when we were at Secunderabad Club enjoying ourselves (Sipping Chilled beer), messege came to rush back to AFA as the aircraft will be leaving from Begumpet. All excitement, suspense,imagining and everyone discussing and guessing as to when the balloon will go up. Having also seen token action of 1965 war in the East while being posted at Hasimara, I can say things were extremely well organized and planned this time. We commenced our journey from Begumpet ,in an Dakota, somewhere around 8/ 9 pm. It happened to be Diwali night. All on board the Dakota aircraft had the opportunity of enjoying all India Diwali , besides the cold at that height.

Once we arrived at Palam ,the transition camp - humming with activity - handed us our railway warrants to go to our respective old units from where we had all gone for the course etc. Incidentally before this happened I was earmarked for FAC Duties

(Forward Air Controller – A pilot who is placed on ground along with army at reasonably forward post from where he can see the enemy forces and able to guide our own aircraft on to them successfully) somewhere in western sector, which was not acceptable to me.

At night I telephoned Adampur, my CO Wg Cdr K C Khanna and Sqn Ldr Banerji M Flt Cdr. On their intervention it was changed and I boarded the train for Adampur to join 101 Squadron once again. From 20 Oct 71 till commencement of war we did few familiarisation sorties to get our hand back. And finally the day arrived and on the evening of 3 Dec 71 the war finally broke out officially. All that is well documented and known to all. But this is my personal story of my short involvement in the operations.

4th December 1971

On the morning of 4th Dec 71 we woke up almost at 4 O'clock to attend the Met Briefing. Not that we had any proper sleep at night. The news and expectations as to what is going to happen, after hearing the news on radio in the evening on 3 Dec 71, the next day, kept one half awake thruout the whatever was left of the night hours. Once we arrived at Adampur Base Ops we found it to be humming with activity. We met pilots from TACDE, Then known as TCTDS who had already undertaken night missions and landed at Adampur either for another mission or refuelling on their way back to Ambala. All attended the briefings - the weather was expected to be widespread fog over Indian as well as Pakistani airspace. Our CO and Flight Commander were briefed separately regarding the targets to be attacked. Rest of us proceeded to our respective crew rooms for preparations of the missions.

Here I must make a mention that from 18 Oct to 4 Dec 71 while at Adampur I had some back problems and it was very difficult for me to walk properly or even get into the aircrew van which in those days was a rickety rack One Tonner vehicle. The rear platform was quite high and had no steps to get into. Initially I tried some local lotions etc but of no avail. When I could not bear it I finally went to MH Jalandhar Cantt. They took an X-ray but to my utter surprise and horror found nothing wrong clinically. But I continued to have pain and problems as earlier. I continued to fly too, although having difficulty in climbing the long ladder into S-22 cockpit. Once I was in the cockpit or sitting in crew room it was OK but problems in getting up walking, climbing stairs etc. Once Military Hospital authorities found nothing wrong, I could not say much. If I had refused to fly it would/could have been taken as an act of

cowardice and chickening out under adverse circumstances. So inspite of everyone knowing about it but on my insistence I was allowed to continue flying.

After the first mission by IAF it was now time to fan out in support of Army. Our squadron was assigned the task of supporting the ground troops in Chamb sector. So as we landed after the first mission myself and Flt Lt J Bhattacharya were assigned for Close Air Support mission in Chamb sector. We both went to our GLO who thoroughly briefed us on all aspects, targets to be attacked , precautions to be taken and alternate targets etc. And there we were fully briefed and raring to go once again .

The fateful sortie

My memory on time fails me for exact timings but it must have been aproximately about 9-9.15 am when I as No.2 took off from Adampur airfield , skirting Pathankot and the Shakargarh bulge to approach the battle field area of Chamb. As is well known that on the night of 3-4 Dec the Pakistanis had tried their armour thrust with the aim of cutting of Kashmir from the rest of India and had succeeded in entering Indian territory, hence the need for urgent air support.

On dot on time we contacted the FAC Fg Offr V G Kumar another pilot from Adampur base itself and well known to each other. He tried his best to guide my leader but some how or the other he was not able to make contact with the tanks. We carried on orbitting making efforts to locate the targets. Although I had contact with the enemy tanks and also tried to guide him besides the FAC but without any success. As we had already spent enough time in orbitting and locating the targets and were also getting low on fuel without yet having achieved the main aim of attacking their tanks.

My leader asked me to overshoot him and carry on with the attack as I was in contact with the enemy tanks. In the meanwhile having already warned the enemy about our presence, gave them sufficient time not only to hide themselves under a grove of trees but also be ready to take shot at us. So having overshoot my leader I turned around and pulled up for the attack. We had selected four rockets to be fired at a time from all four pods so that 16 -57 mm rockets are released each time which would have given us four passess with 16 rockets in each pass besides the gun passess if required.

I think it was almost simultaneous because as I released the rockets at the proper range more or lesss the same time I heard some thuds on my aircraft, which I soon realised were ack ack gun hits from the same tanks which I had fired upon and destroyed

(confirmed later on by Army troops as well as the FAC)So as I looked inside to check the after effects of those thuds. What I saw stunned me as numerous red lights were flashing and guages were giving erratic readings, indicating engine failure and fire in the aircraft. I was obviously heading in a direction which would have taken me deeper into Pakistan territory. But that intuition , sixth sense and presence of mind made me turn towards Indian territory while pulling up to gain maximum height so that I could glide as much into Indian side as possible. Because ejecting immediately would have been asking for sure place in POW camp if captured alive. After all we are all trained for our life to be able to defend our Nation while fighting the enemy, and if an eventuality arises must try to come back safely which will not only be better as an individual but a morale booster for colleagues too.

So there I was having almost climbed to one Km plus (~3300 feet AGL) and hopefully heading towards Indian side as all instruments were not behaving properly and believed in them with a pinch of salt. While I was trying to make RT calls to declare my emergency and intentions of ejecting I was also making an attempt to relight the engine which could take me to nearest airfield Pathankot for an emergency landing. Because under the circumstances going back to to Adampur was asking for too much. I tried an MAY DAY call but as even R/T had packed up it was a futile one. My leader did not see me ejecting or had any knowledge about my whereabouts or fate.

Ejection

In the process while gliding I was also losing height having failed in my attempts at hot relight etc. And I suddenly found myself to be almost at tree-top Heights or rather even lower. I called to myself that it is now or never. No question of asking yourself for any further clarification - just punch out. That is exactly what I did as I literally yanked back on the stick to pull the aircraft out of shallow gliding attitude otherwise considering the height and downwards angle, ejection would have been fatal. It almost was even otherwise. As I levelled the aircraft at tree tops and pulled both EJECTION handles as trained with all the might not to err in applying the required force. The last I observed the ASI (Air Speed Indicator) was almost showing zero.

What happened immediately after that is unknown. The whole process does not take much time as sequence of action takes place in milliseconds one after another and for low height ejections like mine the parachute opens immediately and there is no free fall. After those couple of seconds which are blank in my life I found myself safely under the life saving canopy giving me assurance that everything functioned as laid

down in the manual and expected by manufacturer. While this process of EJECTION was taking place the aircraft being at low altitude crashed almost simultaneously and almost fully armed aircraft and still plenty of fuel remaining , catching fire instantaneousy sending flames high up in the air,to the same height where I was hanging by the parachute and coming down.

Everything was happening so rapidly. I was engulfed in those flames making me not only difficult rather impossible to see where I was going to land , but besides my clothes also catching fire. I was getting intense heat on my face and my eyebrows too got burnt somewhat, forcing me to close my eyes . Having ejected at very low height , affected by fire I had no time to put my feet even together for so called class room trained landing .Before I could realise I was dumped on the ground at a fall rate faster than expected because due to flames and high temperatures the parachute got smouldered making it come down at a faster rate of decsent. As I had landed in fire spread out from the wreckage I stood up immediately to run away from fire to a safer place and distance from the crashed aircraft. As I stood I soon realised that because of uneven landing as my feet were not placed together, closed eyes and even the undulated terrain of the fields I had fractured myself and was in no condition to walk.

I was in extreme pain but had to take action immidiately to save from the fire. Besides the aircraft was bursting and leftover ammunition firing / exploding in random directions, fortunately not in my direction.

Thank GOD for small mercy. It was bad enough to leave the cool comfort of the aircraft and being all alone ,on the ground that too in an hostile environment.(no doubt they say Cockpit is really safe place) After a safe ejection it would have been unfortunate to be killed by own aircraft ammunition. So I unmasked myself threw the bonedome away and started dragging myself away from the wreckage towards a few trees which I planned to be my resting and recouping place and charting further plan of action. I was feeling thirsty and sweating in pain and wondering what next? It was about 1000-1015 hrs when this happened.

Contrary to what some people talk no family thoughts came to my mind either before or after ejection, although I had got married only on 27 sep 71. I did not even see my leader aircraft anywhere in the vicinity locating me. Later on I learnt he did not see my aircraft at all.

The army's rescue attempt

It must have been approximately 15-20 minutes or so when I suddenly saw an ambulance typical One Tonner vehicle of Indian army about 150 yards away. I thought myself to be lucky that rescue operation has been very prompt, although I was unsure of actual ground position and this vehicle could have been from anyside (Although Pakistanis I think use Crescent on Hospital vehicles) Being injured and unable to walk away I had to depend on someone to rescue me friend or foe. Before I could realise the help which came suddenly vanished and I could not spot the ambulance. Was it a mirage or my imagination that I will be saved quickly and avoid the agony of pain and suffering for how long unknown to me .

Well there I was once again planning further action in whatever way possible for me with the grave injury. I was contemplating throwing the overall into the fire (as we all were flying with civil clothes underneath. Even having a pair of scissors to cut hair if required, besides of course having some Pakistani currency also)In my condition it was prudent to wait till dark which was a long way to go and hope like hell that I manage to reach Indian side as early as possible. Lot of permutaions and combinations went thru the mind in short period, cancelling many ideas and coming out with new ones. But I was not able to come up with a fool proof plan . The best was to wait , rest and think after the shock of ejection had subsided somewhat. I think it was maximum within 45 minutes of ejection and once again I saw another vehicle – this time a Willys Jeep.

As I learnt later on the ambulance crew had gone back saying fire of the wreckage is wide spread and no one could have survived. But Capt Appayya , from Engineers was adamant and perhaps very keen to capture first Pakistani pilot and took none of the nonsense and came himself for search along with another young officer and some jawans fully armed with weapons. I too did not want to miss this and perhaps the last chance of rescue.

Being a smaller vehicle it drove closer towards me and I too tried to whistle and waved hands to attract attention. It worked and they all jumped out of the jeep after driving a little closer and in no time surrounded me with rifles pointing at me. A typical scene from a western movie. There I was helpless lying half reclined on the ground with pain and weapons all around ready to shoot any moment. Some anxious moments passed looked like eternity as there was stunned silence except the booming of tank fire from both sides every now and then. But then wait how long.

I think both sides decided almost simultaneously and as I thought of being the first one ,the Capt took the initiative asking me -"Who are you?"

I had no choice and I said "INDIAN".

No smiles no emotions no change in attitude or weapons being lowered. Too soon to expect perhaps.

Then again some anxious silent moments passed and some conversation took place like myself asking units around, mentioning the name of Brigade for whose support we had flown ,also telling the name of FAC Fg Offr VG kumar from ADAMPUR. How much effect it had on them in convincing I did not know then.

Then suddenly once again I was asked "Have you got a weapon?" , and I was asked to throw it towards them , which I did . What amazed them was why was the first chamber empty. They were convinced on my explanation of accidental firing in overall pocket will spare me from injury. Then I was asked for map, any other documents,like code words etc which I threw towards them. Once all this done I thought it was over and I will be rescued , but nothing of sort happened, which left me completely confused and wondering what next.

After some more horrifying moments I finally took the courage when I found no further initiative from them, by asking that one question which was bugging me that who are you? I waited eagerly for a favourable answer as per me. Then ultimately after a little delay which appeared the longest in my life the Capt said "INDIAN!".

I was happy to hear that and so was he as I learnt later. I have been mentioning again and again later on , the reason being that the same Capt was shot later on and had a bullet in his stomach. Not only he landed up in the same Army Hospiatal Delhi Cantt but in my room where there were three patients. It was here where I spent from 6 Dec 71 to second week of March 72 that we all discussed and learnt about these details which I would have never ever come to know.

But inspite of all these clarifications I was still lying there. But soon after when I said I was suffering from pain why don't we go where there was friendly activity. I was being helped to be evacuated. As I was in pain and seeing the Willys Jeep and also knowing about the ambulance I told why don't you call the ambulance. Because in Jeep I would have been bundled increasing my agony further. The Capt then pointed

to objects not very far away, THE PAKI TANKS , saying we cant wait here too long otherwise we will be sure targets for them as they pointed towards antennas of some vehicles literally aiming in our direction . Thanks to Pakistanis they gave us enough time to finish our formalities. Although I have taken time to write these details I don't think in the battle field it was so long. Otherwise I wont be writing this story. So I was folded and dumped into jeep with all those people sitting all around. Nothing against them , they did their best , but those who know Willys jeep will realise the amount space for a patient with multiple fractures being there .

Evacuated to the Forward Post

I was driven for short distance and placed in an underground bunker managed by the Advanced Dressing Station in the field (this I think is the most forward medical help available) They did not want to drive during day time because of fear of being attacked again. This cross type bunker was next to a tree where an Indian tank was parked and firing every now and then. After having seen the comfort of cockpit and then the ejection experience , the case of almost being shot after survival, the agony was not over yet. I was in pain as it is. Whenever the tank fired the bunker shaked and a little bit of earth fell with dust all around. I was sure that this tank will be enemy target too but I am thankful to Pakistanis that I survived because tank remained safe obviously. Inside a poor Jawan of med corps was running around to help the injured, although I found no one else there. He appeared quite worried, But was kind enough to help me with water from his hip bottle which had very little left as it is.No other medical aid could be provided as none was available there. I had no choice but to wait till dark suffering or no. One had no choice anywhere. (In Army hospital Delhi Cantt I was later informed by the same Captain that In case I had made slightest suspicious moment I would have been shot) I am grateful to GOD who gave them the wisdom to think in a positive way to spare me and once again serve the nation which I did till I superannuated

Then in the evening along with some other patients we were put in an Ambulance and driven To Jaurian hospital. What a ride through fields! It was no comparison to smooth flying I was so used to. Once we reached the hospital it was around 9 pm or so and doctors were quick enough to attend. It was initially planks put to keep my leg straight. After some time they put plaster in Hurricane Lamp light. With no facility for Anasthesia it was simple and pure general medical aid. The way doctor twisted my leg to straighten it only I know the pain I went thru, perhaps pregnant ladies will know it better. But the plaster was so bloody tight that I was in more pain than even before. I was literally howling and told the doctor please do something otherwise I will break it

.He was kind enough to help me and make me a little more comfortable. The night passed somehow as I had hardly any choice but to bear it anyway. Some food whatever available or given one had to swallow to survive . Under the circumstances even they had hardly any choice to offer.

Having come to hospital (they had no x ray facility there) I did come to know that I had three fractures one on the foot Navicular, shin bone , and major one on left knee – multiple internal fractures. All this because of my uneven landing with left foot taking all the weight .

The morning of December 5th was another exciting experience. Till now I was declared missing. Communication was poor. The squadron mates were hopefully waiting for some good news , perticularly they were worried about my backache and wondering what could have happened to me.

I still have not come to know as to how it happened but it did. My wife who was residing in Ferozepore Cantt after having shifted there from Shimla just end of October 71. She had come to Jallandar Cantt on 4 Dec 71 only because shelling had made life at Jhoke Hari Har village at Ferozepore extremely difficult, with shelling taking place continuously. Her brother was somewhere in Amritsar sector as a young captain in Signals. How he ever came to know I still don't know, but from where ever he learnt he sent his Batman to Adampur to enquire about my wellbeing. As IAF base did not know about my fate they were unable to comment and just said all is fine, he is busy flying .

In any case they did not want to tell anything on telephone to unknown persons. This is generally the answer when you want to avoid answering the actuality. Somehow the night passed in acute pain and hardly any sleep. In any case flying was going on not knowing IAF or PAF and some sort of heavy and small arms fire taking place , so where was the question of sleep?. Having come to safer place it was now time to think about family and friends and lots of thoughts went thru the mind. Simultaneously the information reached the higher ups that I was safe . Obviously Adampur base was aslo informed and further action started, the further rescue and of course medical treatment, which was urgently needed.

Helicopter Evacuation to Udhampur

I was informed at night that a helicopter Mi-4 will be sent to take casualties to Udhampur Base Hospital. There were three or four of us. The chopper arrived . The plan was to keep rotating and shift the patients in and get off again as quickly as

possible. After the chopper arrival we were being shifted by Army Jawans towards the helicopter, but just then PAF MiG 19 arrived on the scene orbiting overhead. I don't know if they spotted the chopper kicking up dust or not but as a precaution Mi 4 switched off for safety. And imagine what the Jawans who were lifting stretchers did - They almost dropped us on mother earth and ran for safety. Leaving us as good targets for PAF although I wonder if PAF knew about our presence at all.

There we were helpless lying on the ground fully exposed where as others ran into trenches. This is what happens when you have to depend on others. We had no alternative but to be guinea pigs. Fortunately an officer came to our rescue . He lambasted the Jawans for leaving all handicapped injured persons to their mercy and forgetting all ethics . Then we were shifted to slightly better and safer place and not in the open. In any case MiG 19 shelling would not have spared between the injured or otherwise. I am thankful to PAF for not spotting the chopper and going back when their mission was over because of fuel constraints.

As they flew away and before the next wave came activity commenced and we all injured were hurriedly shifted into chopper while chopper pilots were starting it . Almost simultaneously as they finished their starting drill we were too in and he took off. What followed was a low level sortie following the contours of hills and we landed at UDHAMPUR Airfield. Luckily the ambulance was waiting and we were quickly taken to Base Hospital a much better place for medical facilities. An X Ray was taken and Doctors attended the injured ones. It was here I was told about the exact nature of injuries , which were and still are : COMMINUTED FRACTURE MEDICAL CONDYLETIBIA, NAVICULAR AND CUBOID (Rt)

I was cared for thruout the day and felt comfortable in better surroundings. Better food also made the difference.

Flight to Army Hospital Delhi

On the other side activities were going on to take injured ones including me to Delhi for further and final treatment. I was told that I will be evacuated by air soon. Day time was meant for fighters only or very special transport aircraft missions as bombers. A DHC-3 Otter was ready to take the casualties to Delhi. As the night fell which was quite early in those months three casualties were ready to be evacuated and we were shifted into Otter aircraft. One patient was worse than me ,other a little better .I can say my situation was average. myself not a major problem as such.

What a ride it was in the Otter. Total darkness. A nightmare in hills, I should know being a fighter pilot. No lights at all. We as well as the Otter pilot were worried about aerial attack, fortunately it was safe journey to ADAMPUR, a refuelling point besides my base to tell them I was safe and sound. The Otter landed sometime at midnight and my sqn mates and my flight commander were there to welcome me.

What a great feeling to be among the same people and a friendly atmosphere. The stay was short. I still remember my Flight Commander asking that should they inform my family means wife. I said NO because their message could have been interpreted differently and cause confusion. I chose to do that myself, not knowing that my wife has already come to know (but how ???????? Still a secret or mystery ????).

Once the squadron learnt about my ejection they were all worried about my back and were 100 % sure that I would have backbone injury. But amazingly after the Ejection although I had other injuries but back problem was cured totally. From that day onwards the joke in 101 Sqn AF or rather Adampur was that if you have back bone problems, then Ejection is a sure shot cure. But I would not recommend it, as trying something the results of which you are not sure is a gamble.

I met all these people in Adampur in MI Room and soon time was there to start further journey. We were taken to tarmac again and back into Otter for onward journey. We landed at Palam approximately at 3.30 am or so. It was windy, very cold, but Ambulances were available at the Tarmac to transfer us to Army Hospital which was going to be my home till middle of March 1972. That was end of war for me having done my duty and now shifted away from battle field into a safer area.

The final treatment process was initiated soon and I was operated upon properly and satisfactorily and the recovery process commenced. I was in bed till 26 Jan 72 when for the first time walked on crutches and after about another month with a stick which became a part of me till almost Sep/Oct 72 when I discarded the stick too and balanced on my own with a limp which still persists, besides osteo arthritis (setting in much earlier than expected) problem and associated pain.

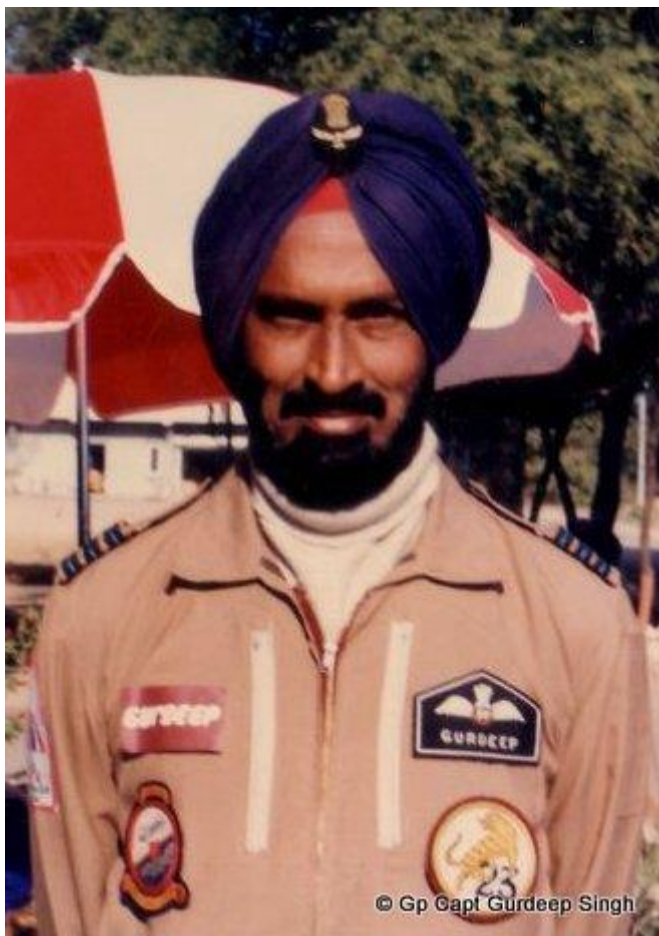
It was after about 24 hrs when as I told earlier my wife did come to know and she visited me in Army Hospital soon after learning from ADAMPUR that I have been shifted there. Then ofcourse Army Hospital was our home and she visited as often as possible till I was discharged from there on 14 Mar 72 and after two months of annual leave join duty at AFA Dundigal and resume flying again in Jan 1973.

The aftermath

Of course for next eight years my regular medical check ups initially every quarter, then six monthly and later yearly at CME Delhi or IAM Bangalore kept me busy with medicos. Finally I got A2G2 as permanent cat and continued to fly all types of aircraft in all parts of the world. And now living a retired life with all the fond memories of yesteryears spent in IAF and the wars took part in. (Took active part in 65 and 71, besides being associated with KARGIL from Adampur where I happened to be COO when the conflict started during my re-employment tenure .) What a great life it was . Love to be continued to be associated with IAF for ever.

PS : if there is any indication of war in the immediate future Don't get married because anything can happen. So better to stay single to avoid agony to two families. The other reason you will get ample opportunity to interact with ppl in Hospital. (Applicable to Both genders) and decide peacefully. Well I have no regrets in tying the knot earlier. WARS are NO good. Hardly any Nation has ever gained as The History tells us .

Let us learn to live in PEACE. AMEN



he author, Gp Capt Gurdeep Singh, regained his flying category and went on to have a fulfilling career flying fighters in the IAF. In his latter years, he flew all versions of the MiG-21, commanded No.23 Squadron "Panthers" and flew MiG-23 fighters as well before retiring in 1995. He was also involved in the Kargil operations as COO of Adampur when he was re-employed as a reserve officer.

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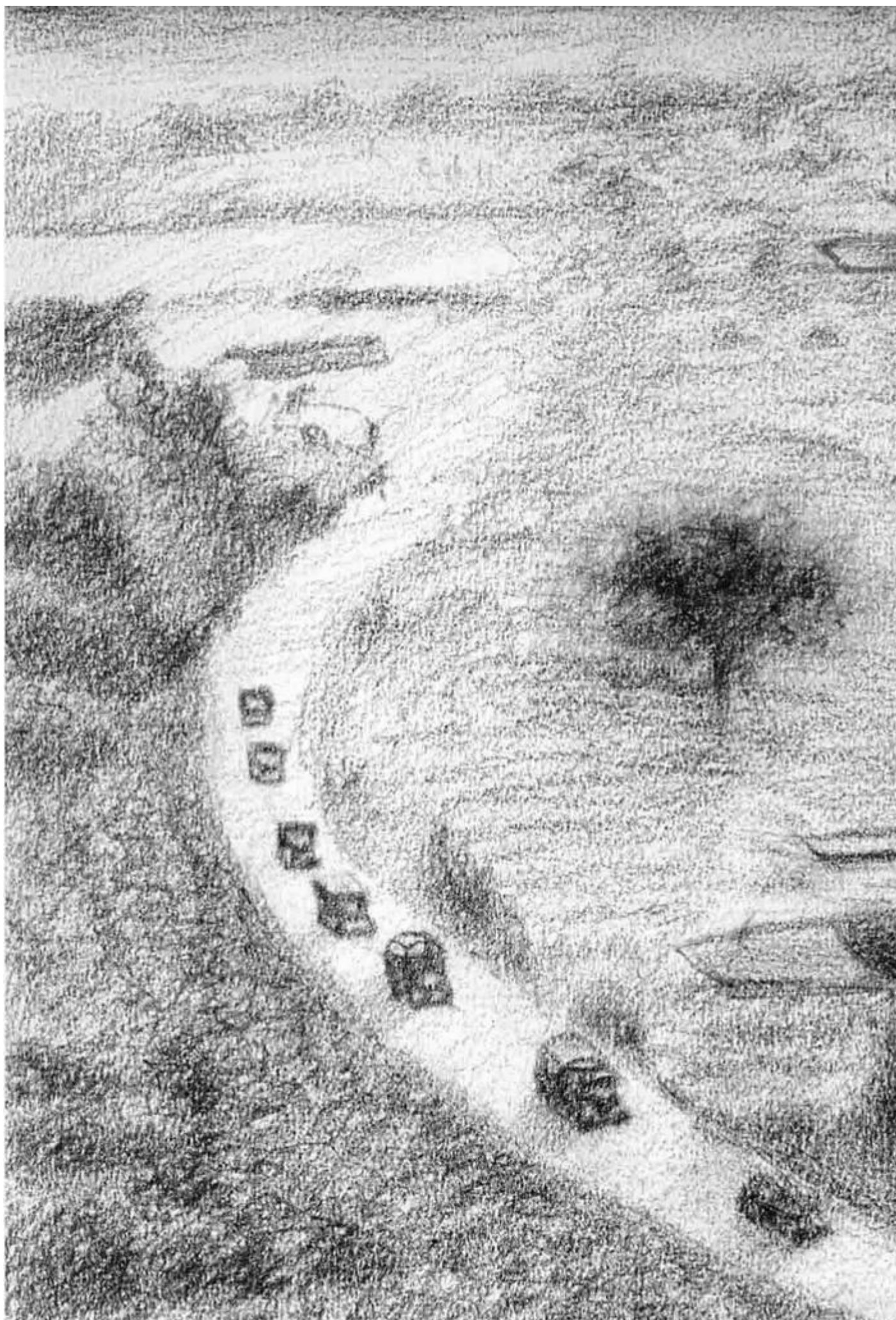
Ejected over No Man's Land! - The view from the other side

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Saturday, 22 December 2018 16:41

Written by Webmaster

Hits: 5679



The pencil sketch featured in "Forged in the furnace of the battle"

Group Captain Gurdeep Singh Samra's harrowing story " [Ejected over no-man's land](#) " caught the eye of another war veteran - from the other side of the border. Major General Syed Ali Hamid is a noted historian who had authored the History of the Pakistani Armoured Corps as well as his own regiment - 26 Cavalry - [Forged in the Furnace of Battle](#) . A frequent contributor to the Journal of the Indian Military Historical Society in UK, He also happens to be an armoured corps veteran, who was deployed in Chamb on that day.

He writes to Gp Capt Gurdeep Singh:

"I was adjutant 26 Cavalry in Chhamb Sector during the 1971 War and went and saw the wreckage of your aircraft. I was intrigued to see how intact the airframe was and now i know why..... because you ejected so close to the ground at stalling speed. I really enjoyed your article as i could relate to so much of your narrative. From your account and the location of the crashsite i can conclude that you were looking for tanks in the area genline south of Chhamb , whereas the bulk of our armour on the morning of 4 Dec was opposite Mandiala in the North.

Only two squadrons of Shermans of my regiment were operating in the area you were probably searching and there was good cover available from the mango trees. It is also likely that the .50 Brownings of our tanks shot u down as there were no AA guns supporting the division.

That very morning i was leading a convoy of ammo and POL vehicles of my regt when a pair of SUs passed overhead.....fortunately for us they did not attack. It may well have been you. I had a sketch made to the aircraft for the book I wrote on the war history of my regiment that I would like to dedicate to you.

Glad you survived and God Bless"

General Ali Hamid procured photographs of the aircraft a few years ago for his book project and he has kindly shared them here.

"I came across the wreck on the day we entered Chhamb. The images were taken a couple of months later by a team from Pakistan Television that was visiting the battlefield and i obtained them from the archives of the Directorate of Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) only a couple of years ago. "

"I was a keen aero modeler and it was interesting to see three types of Indian aircraft in action in Chhamb. The Hunters were the most impressive and very graceful. The

Ajeets were very nimble and scary because they appeared very suddenly. The SU were slow like a bus and while they circled and came into an attack it gave us ample time to take cover. But i still remember its deep howl in the dive run which had a ominous tone"

"The location was within the salient, close to Burejal (an Indian post) which was 10,000 yards SE of Chhamb close to the CFL. I inspected this wreckage and remember that (as the picture also shows) that it was in pretty good condition)"

With a Damaged Tail Plane over DZ at Tangail

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

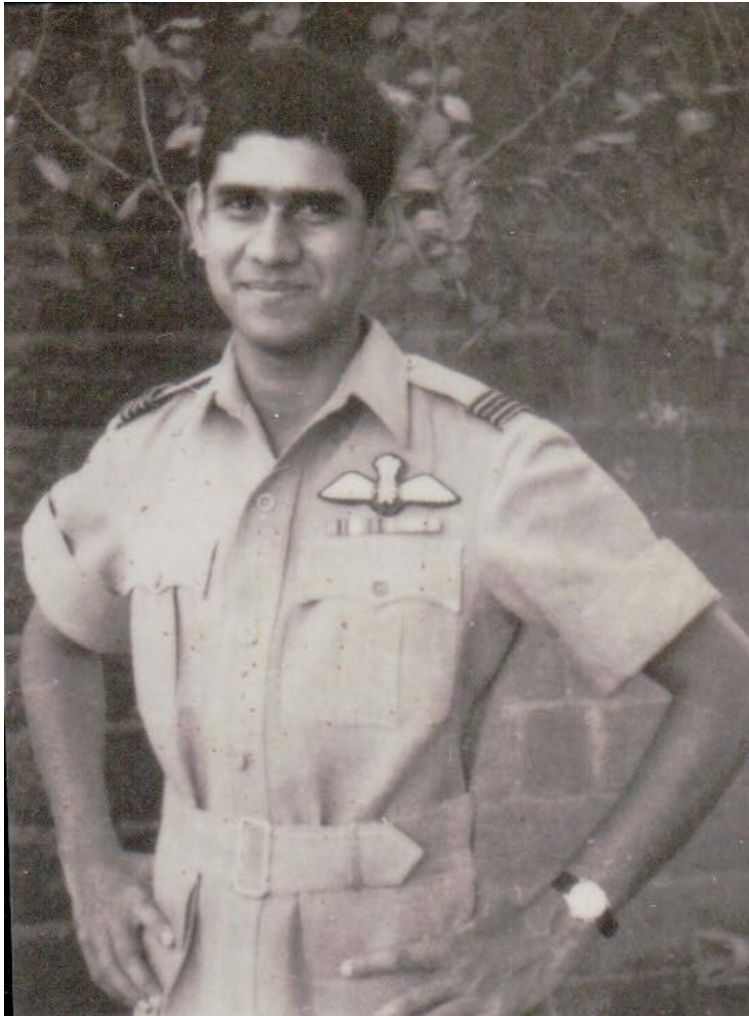
Last Updated: Sunday, 18 November 2018 23:31

Written by Gp Capt Patri Jaya Rao

Hits: 7154

Group Captain [Patri Jayarao](#) (7708 F(P)) , a Transport veteran of the 1971 war was commissioned on 28 Oct 1963 as part of the 85 Pilot's Course. For the first time he reveals an incident that occurred during the Tangail Para drop that could have had dire consequences.

I am writing about this incident after 47 years, mainly to place this on record as part of IAF History.



Background.

This is a brief account of what happened on 11 December, 1971 during the airborne assault over the Dropping Zone (DZ), near Tangail in East Pakistan during Operation 'CACTUS-LILLY', the military operation conducted by the Indian Armed Forces for the liberation of erstwhile East Pakistan. In this operation, 2nd Para Battalion of 50 Independent Parachute Brigade were parachuted onto a DZ close to Tangail, about 70 miles North West of Dacca. The aim was to capture the Poongli bridge over the River Jamuna and prevent Pakistani 93 Brigade from retreating into Dacca to reinforce its defenses. The air transport force comprised of two Fairchild Packets as pathfinders, Six AN-12s for heavy drops, followed by 20 Packets and 22 Dakotas. Two Caribou aircraft were deployed in a decoy operation far away from the main objective.

Gathering of the Force.

The AN-12 Detachment operated from Dum Dum. The Packets operated from Agra and Allahabad staging through Kolkata. The Dakota force was based at Bihta, an airfield near Patna. The 22 aircraft Dakota Task Force was made up of aircraft from 11 Sqn led by Wg Cdr Roy who was also the Dakota Force Commander, 43 Sqn led by Wg Cdr KC Sharma, 49 Sqn led by Wg Cdr M K Rudra and Transport Training

Wing from Yelahanka led by Wg Cdr R C Sondhi. On 11 December 71, all 22 Dakotas were flown to Kalaikunda for briefing and launching the operation.

Briefing was conducted by Wg Cdr JK Seth CO 12 Sqn. It was followed by a short motivational address by Lt Col KS Pannu CO of 2 Para. The operation was complex with three types of aircraft flying over the DZ at different speeds and different heights. Besides, the unarmed Packets / Dakotas / AN-12s would be inside East Pakistan for considerable time. That by itself was not a problem since the Indian Air Force had achieved complete air supremacy over East Pakistan by 08 Dec 71.

The Air Plan as briefed was, initially the Pathfinders would mark the DZ enabling the six AN-12s to drop artillery guns and heavy vehicles followed by 20 Packets with lighter vehicles and RCL guns on jeeps as well as paratroopers, and in the end 22 Dakotas would drop the main body of the Attack Force. In the Dakota Stream of 22 aircraft, 11 Sqn was in the lead followed by 43 Sqn 49 Sqn and TTW. The ETA over the DZ was given at 1635 hrs which was sunset time for Tangail. This meant that all the aircraft, except the Dakotas, would have dropped their cargo in good light conditions. Our emergency diversion was Rampurhat which was being controlled by the Tactical Air Centre TAC from XXXIII Corps at Siliguri. Rampurhat was a World War II airfield abandoned since, and none of us had ever seen it let alone landed there during our flying careers.

At the Tail end.

As a Flt Lt, I was one of the six Instructors from Yelahanka making up the TTW Section of 22 aircraft Dakota Formation. Initially, my slot was to be No 2 to our Chief Instructor Wg Cdr Sondhi, who was my Instructor during my training on Dakotas back in 1963. After arriving at Kalaikunda he changed my position to become the very last Dakota at the end of 22 aircraft Stream. His words were, “there will be a lot of waltzing in the air as the tail-end Charlie”. True, the aircraft wake of the preceding 21 Dakotas and all the oscillations of 21 aircraft ahead, would make my aircraft unsteady. I thought it was his way of showing confidence in me.

My aircraft was BJ –972, with Flying Officer [AMS Tanwar](#) (my pupil) as co-pilot, Flight Lieutenant [VP Davray](#) as Navigator and Flight Sgt SR Singh as our Flight Signaller. We also had two Parachute Jumping Instructors (PJI) from Paratrooper Training School and 18 Troops from 2 Para. There were 24 of us in Dakota BJ-972 that afternoon. The briefing over, we started our respective aircraft waiting to taxi out in the order that we would be dropping our troops over Tangail. There was tenseness

in the air and we knew a massive drop of about 700 paratroopers with artillery and engineers would be a historic operation.

Violent 'Hangup' During the Drop.

All the aircraft got airborne safely. We maintained total RT silence. As we crossed the border we could hear two fighters engaged in continuous RT chatter. Our flight up to the DZ was uneventful. The weather was good and smooth. Visibility was hazy especially as we closed into sunset. One by one the aircraft ahead of us started dropping. We were in a line-astern formation, so we could see at least three aircraft ahead dropping their troops, and we were flying at 1000 feet above ground level.

We aligned with the DZ and prepared BJ-972 for the drop, keeping a steady speed. At the designated point before the DZ, the Navigator started the countdown with 5...4... 3... 2... 1... , and I gave the 'Green On' signal.

The PJI, as per the drill, started giving the count for the troops that were jumping out of the Dakota; 1, 2, 3, till he came to 17 and then he paused..... Immediately it struck me that there was some problem, so I asked Fg Offr Tanwar to peep behind through the cockpit door to see what was happening.

At that very instant, there was a severe 'THUD' and both of us experienced 'Red-Out' for a few seconds. The aircraft plunged nose down and there was no response even with hard pull back on the control column.

Instantly, all the training on 'Paratrooper Hang Up' came into my mind. I tried all stunts like severe yawing to the left and right, followed by rolling the aircraft to the left and right. I opened full power, and closed power, lowered and raised flaps.

Somehow, by about 300 ft above ground we were able to regain pitch control and maintain height after that. Our Dakota had lost about 700 feet by then but there was severe vibration and juddering on the control column.

The Navigator came into the cockpit and informed me that one Paratrooper had hit our tail plane and was hanging on it for a while. We knew that some damage had occurred to the tailplane, but could not ascertain how much, besides it was now getting dark and the Dakotas did not have inspection lights to see the tail plane.

Partial Response from Controls.

On enquiry, the PJI confirmed that the Trooper was free of the tail plane. Our primary job at that time was to control the aircraft and set course for the diversion. The Nav gave a Course to Rampurhat onto a heading of about 280 degrees (as I recall). Once on course, we gradually gained height to about 1500 ft above ground, for added safety. The aircraft was maintaining level with great effort but the elevator required lot of effort with excessive trimming, presumably due to the damage on the tail plane. Even with increased power on both engines, the speed was settled to around 120 mph.

The Navigator and the PJI gave a brief report. It seemed that the 18th Paratrooper hesitated to jump, and in that confusion pulled his rip cord while still inside the aircraft partially deploying his parachute. Then surprisingly, and against all Standard Operating Procedures, the PJIs pushed him out of the aircraft. With that partially deployed chute he did not jump clear of the aircraft, and due to propeller slipstream, went and got entangled with the tailplane. We were very lucky that he somehow got free of the aircraft with all that wild maneuvering, and regained control. All this must have taken about two or three minutes but seemed an eternity.

On course to Rampurhat the co-pilot gave a PAN call, a cautionary emergency broadcast. There was no response from any one, not even from the aircraft of my own Dakota Section. We would take at least one hour to reach Rampurhat at this reduced speed which was not a problem as we had enough fuel and the engines were operating quite normal. The main problem for me was the severe juddering and noisy vibrations. But they were coming intermittently, I thought it must be because of the damaged Tail Plane. One can imagine the uncertainty and apprehension as to whether the damage to aircraft controls would further increase as we flew to Rampurhat. Throughout the crippled flight, in my mind, I was acutely aware that any time the tail plane may say good bye leaving us with no options.

PJIs Itching to Jump.

As soon as we set Course, the two PJIs came into Cockpit and asked me if they could jump out. Perhaps they wanted to get out of the aircraft when the going was good. They were told to stay put as there was no need to panic at that stage. After a while the two PJIs again repeated their request and once more assured them that we were not going to crash - as yet. Every time they walked forward into the cockpit my Elevator Trim which was already strained badly because of the Tail Plane damage, got further compounded and It was a struggle to keep BJ-972 flying level. Finally, when they came to the cockpit a third time, I had to threaten them with gross insubordination and disobedience of orders if they came into the cockpit once again. That made them to

strap up and sit tight. We should understand and appreciate their keenness to jump out, which showed their training and confidence. But my option to keep flying was also the same reasons: Training and confidence in the Dakota.

After about 10 minutes of flying, suddenly out of the blue the controller from 'Eastern Control' called us and asked for my intention. The Eastern Control was informed that we were diverting to Rampurhat. The Control gave us the Course to Rampurhat which was about the same as we were flying. This meant that the radar of Eastern Control had identified us on his console which gave us some confidence, as someone on ground was following us. By then we estimated that we were about 50 minutes flying time from Rampurhat. But surprisingly, within ten minutes Eastern Control again comes up and asked us our position. In reply we asked him to give us our position as he was monitoring us on his Radar. He then startled us by saying that he had 'no joy' on our aircraft, it was unexpected, especially after he had given us the direction to fly to Rampurhat earlier. Immediately, I asked the Navigator for our position. There was "no joy" there too as he had closed his Charts thinking that we were under Radar Control. Thus, in addition to our structural problems, we were now unsure of our position, during a dark night with complete "Blackout" all over and all Ground Beacons switched off. Not a happy situation.

Got our Ground Fix.

After a brief discussion with the Navigator, we decided to alter course to the left by about 10 degrees. My idea was that, if we had continued the original course there was a possibility of missing Rampurhat and getting too close to the Himalayan foothills as there were not many prominent features on the ground to map read during night. By turning left, we would hit the river Ganges and by flying West along the river we would find enough features to identify and get a ground fix. This decision turned out to be effective. After flying for about 15 or 20 minutes we reached a very wide river and following the river due West, we looked for distinct features to ascertain our position on ground. There was little moonlight, full moon was nine days earlier on the night of 02 / 03 Dec 1971. We got our position by ground fix by identifying a distinct river feature and thanking our stars we set course for Rampurhat on a Northerly heading.

All is Well that Ends Well.

Finally, we came over the general airfield area and town, but could not locate the runway nor see any lighting and our repeated calls to the Control Tower went unanswered. We started circling overhead and ordered the Flt Sig to fire the Very Pistol that is located on top of the aircraft. This was the recommended practice of

alerting the Air Traffic Control that there is an aircraft overhead intending to land and it worked. Soon we heard some crackling noise in our earphones and after a couple of attempts we got a welcome message from the ground. He introduced himself as [Gp Capt Sam Venkat Rao](#), a very senior navigator who was the Tactical Air Centre Commander.

We enquired about the airstrip lighting. He apologized that they had only six Goose-necks (oil cans with long spouts and wick filled with kerosene) which were working. We requested him to mark the beginning and the end of the runway with three Goose-necks each and light up the Thresh-Hold with their vehicle's head lights. Luckily, they had a Jeep and a One-Tonner. With those rudimentary lighting arrangements, we started descending to the circuit height and before turning towards the runway for a landing made a final check of flying controls. There was no Rudder control. We had partial Elevator control and of course the Ailerons were normal.

Before landing I briefed Tanwar, to follow me on the controls and cautioned him that we may need a lot of force, by both of us, to keep the aircraft straight and flying as the speed drops off before the landing. Fortunately, we managed a safe landing at about 1845 hrs on 11 Dec 1971. We were received by Groupie Rao himself, he was very cordial and very helpful. After parking we requested him to light up the tail of the aircraft with headlights to visually inspect and assess the damage.

On the Port side of the tail plane was badly damaged and most of the Stabiliser was missing, The Fin had some visual damage, and the Rudder surface completely missing. For the first time we grasped the gravity of the situation that we had flown all the way from the DZ with such damage.

Crew debrief.

On ground, during the Debrief, the PJIs admitted that they made a mistake and it was a blunder to push the paratrooper out when he had pulled his Rip Cord inside the aircraft. They added that they pushed him out as he had a Medium Machine Gun (MMG) strapped to his body and assumed that he was a critical member of his group. That very clearly explained the damage sustained during the time he was banging on the Elevator and Rudder of the aircraft. It was the hard metal MMG in its casing strapped to his body that had caused so much damage to BJ-972. We had the familiar Air Force type (rolled in old newspapers) packed dinner brought to us by Groupie Rao. He wanted us to go with him to TAC HQs in Siliguri, but we declined and decided to stay with the aircraft.

Our CI Wg Cdr Sondhi flew in the relief aircraft himself at 1600 hrs on 12 Dec 71. He had a good look at the aircraft, hugged me and said “Did you really land this aircraft last night?” I could sense the pride of a ‘Guru’ in his voice.

Post Mortem.

On return to Yelahanka, there was an Inquiry into the incident. The Inquiry papers with findings and recommendations were sent to the Dakota Force Commander for his final remarks. The Inquiry was returned after a while with a covering letter stating, “*I have already sent a report to Air HQs stating that the Operation was a great success, and there were no incidents or accidents*”. And for a good measure he added, “*It would be embarrassing for me to forward this report now*”. As promised, Gp Capt Rao, called me and confirmed that Paratrooper Patil, who was involved in that ‘Hang Up’, was safe and joined with his unit. DCO...Duty Carried Out!

Tailpiece.

In that year 1971, we at the Transport Training Wing Yelahanka, were very active throughout the year. We were under great pressure to complete our training schedule of pupil pilots and navigators and also carry out various Route tasks with critical loads towards the build up to the war. In addition to flying with two Ab-Initio cadet courses, two Command Conversion courses, and extensive route flying for the operational buildup, we also took part in ‘Operation Bonnie Jack’ replacing USAF C-130 Flight at Gauhati (prior to the war). We flew in thick of monsoon weather between June and August from Agartala to Kolkata and Pannagarh with the refugees. Flying a Dakota with basic navigation and communication aids during these months was a challenge. Most of us clocked more than 100hrs each month. All the instructors, the trainees, maintenance engineers and technicians of TTW, did a splendid job.

In recognition of their valuable contribution in TTW towards the war effort, three officers were put up for Decorations: President of the Mess Committee, the Mess Secretary and the Station Logistics Officer!.

Flt Lt Lawrence Frederic Pereira, VrC

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

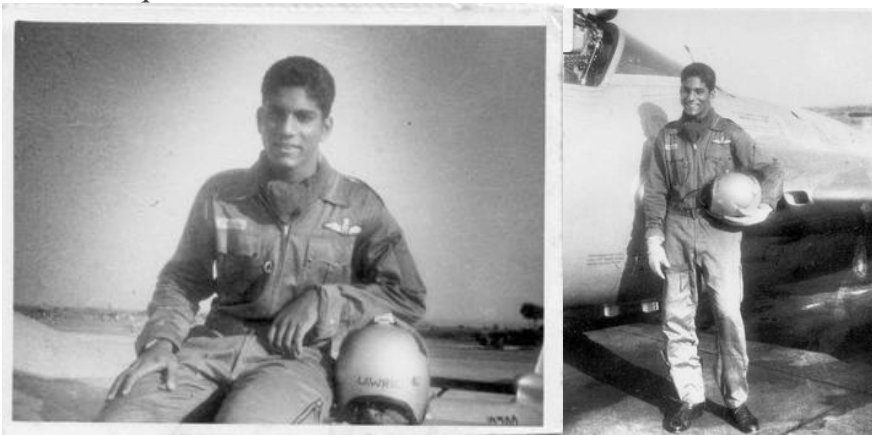
Last Updated: Saturday, 18 February 2017 15:17

Written by Webmaster

Hits: 12738

Lawrence Frederic Pereira was born in Bandra, Bombay on the 10th June 1945 , he was the second of six siblings and was affectionately called "Lawrie" by his family and friends. His early formative years were spent in Goa , he lived with his Uncle and aunt and studied in St Pauls High School , Belgaum. Laurie completed his education in St Stanislaus School , Bombay now Mumbai. He belonged to the Famous Four from St Stanislaus all of whom joined the IAF and were selected to be fighter pilots, the school is very proud of their achievements.

On the 10th March 1963 he started his basic training in the IAF at the Air Force Administrative College in Coimbatore. He was commissioned on the [01 August 1964](#), in the [89/90th Pilots Course](#). In his early career - he attended several training courses and postings. One of his first postings after becoming a pilot was with No.220 Squadron at Pune.



Lawrie from his days with No.221 Squadron - flying the Vampires. Note the helmet with his call sign painted on the back "Lawrie"

He played an active part in the 1965 Indo Pak Conflict.

After the war, he was posted to a Gnat Unit - where he trained on the diminutive fighter.



In 1967 he met his future wife Isabelle who was in the Military Nursing Service and visiting her uncle and aunt on holiday in Ambala, he was a flying officer at the time. In 1968 he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and married on the 12th September 1970 while still stationed in Ambala.

In December of the same year he was sent to Bareilly to do a conversion course on the Sukhoi- 7, Isabelle packed up their home of 3 months and moved to rented accommodation in the town . On completion of the course he was posted to Adampur where the couple house hopped just to be with each other while on the waiting for a house . Laurie was now on the posted strength of No.26 Squadron, IAF.

Outbreak of the War

On the 13th September 1971 he was the proud father to Nicole Annabelle , the family happiness was short lived when war broke out in East Pakistan , now Bangladesh, escalating to the western border when Laurie was deputed as Forward Air Controller with the 2nd Independent Armoured Brigade a powerful tank unit equipped with T55 tanks. Laurie was the dashing young officer who captured the hearts of the brigade right from the first day of his deputation, he was loved for his warm and generous character and got on fabulously with the crew and fellow officers. One of the Army officers in the brigade at that time was Lt Col J K Dutt, of the Central India Horse, who fondly remembers:

"JUNE 1971 was as hot as any summer in central India. We were out on a military exercise with full complements, far away from our cantonment at Bina near Jhansi. I was the Brigade Major (senior operational staff officer) of the Indian Army's 2nd Independent Armoured Brigade, a powerful tank unit equipped with the Russian T 55 tank. My commander, Brigadier Roy Thumbby had recently returned from an operational conference at HQ 1st Corps, Mathura. His grapevine conveyed that there would be a war with Pakistan before the year was out; So we were "shaking ourselves out" in exercise parlance, making sure that men and material were fully fit for battle.

Being a tank brigade, we were on high priority for air support from the Indian Air Force. Arrangements for this were set in motion and soon enough, a dashing young Flight Lieutenant, Lawrence (Laurie) Pereira, joined us as our air support officer. He and I quickly got down to the business of processing air support for our projected operations. He was a thorough professional and the two of us made a good team. Laurie captured our hearts from the very first day. He got on fabulously with the tank crews who would welcome "Laurie Saab" with the traditional tanker's brew whenever an opportunity presented itself during the exercise. He took great pains to familiarise himself with the T 55 tank and ended up driving it like an expert. When the exercise finished after five days or so and time came for Laurie to go, he extracted a promise from Brig Thumbby that should we go to war, the Brigadier would ask for Laurie by name as the air support officer for our brigade. Brig Thumbby readily agreed. We made Laurie an "honorary tanker" and presented him with the armoured corps' black beret which he donned with great pride and affection. Events proceeded fast thereafter and by mid November we were in our concentration area near Pathankot, putting final touches to our preparations. War was certain now.

Then one fine morning who should stride in with a wide grin but Laurie; Brig. Thumbby had pulled all possible strings to get him. The brigade's morale went up sky high on seeing him and we waited expectantly for D Day. On 4th December, I issued the necessary operation orders and our leading elements, Skinner's Horse along with the 1st Dogras debouched in the evening, crossing the international border near the village of Chak Amru. The brigade's other two tank regiments, 7th Cavalry and The Scinde Horse, also advanced into Pakistan to deploy for battle. The 1st Corps' objective was Shakargarh and as battle was joined, the Western Front became truly alive.

For the next few days Laurie was like a man possessed - he was here, there, everywhere. With no consideration for his safety, he would go right up ahead with the front tanks or rush off to a flank in his vehicle, communicating with our IAF's Sukhois and directing them to strafe Pakistani tanks day in and day out. He was indefatigable in his zeal ! I had also participated in the 1965 Indo-Pak war but the air support that we got this time from the IAF was incomparable, courtesy Laurie. The brigade suffered quite a few casualties but it pressed on regardless till we reached the outskirts of Shakargarh."

Tragic Day

On the 14th December 1971 while performing his duties, Laurie Pereira was hit by enemy bullets, when an enemy aircraft strafed the brigade location which was at Shakargarh in Pakistan. Laurie's dying words were , " tell my little girl (his wife Isabelle) to be brave. Colonel Dutt recalls that fateful day:

"I shall never forget 14th December. I had an ominous feeling preying on me all day, which began badly with one of our forward artillery observer's tanks being shot up by Pakistani MIGs. Soon after, I was witness to another incident; a MIG chased an air observation post fixed-wing aircraft. The latter tried desperately to save itself by flying low but to no avail. The MIG lined it up in its sight and let go a long burst of cannon fire, literally crumbling up the aircraft and its pilot.

Sometimes later I was crouched over my command radio set in the operations tent when my foreboding were realised. The dreaded news came on air. The brigade Commander's tank with Brig Thumbby in it had been strafed by the MIGs. He was unhurt but Laurie, who had been standing next to him beside the turret trying to manage some Sukhois, took a burst of cannon fire on his chest. He was evacuated, but succumbed to his injuries. He was 26.

The last days of the war became a drag without Laurie things were just not the same. More than once I had hallucinations of Laurie gathering his Sukhois for a swoop on the enemy's troops. Although we did not have an IAF officer with us anymore, the air support continued unabated even as I processed our demands alone. Ceasefire ushered a pall of gloom to the brigade instead of joy. It was indeed a testimony to Laurie's spirit that his death could so affect us. The day after ceasefire we assembled in our makeshift officers' mess in the field. There was sadness in the air. Laurie had been awarded a posthumous Vir Chakra but how would this help his young widow Isabelle, I thought ?

I missed him intensely. Brig Thumbby, who was equally fond of him was silent and withdrawn; the other staff officer stood by quietly. Later, we raised a silent toast to Laurie, trying to console ourselves with the divine grace, "Thy will be done". Only, it did not seem consolation enough."

Flt Lt Pereira was buried in the RA (Royal Artillery) Cemetery, Garha Road, Jalandhar Cantt with full military honours on 15th Dec 1971.

His grave was covered with a large marble slab with the epitaph:

LOVE AND TRIBUTE
TO THE EVER TREASURED MEMORY OF
LAWRENCE FREDRIC PEREIRA
FLIGHT LIEUTENANT, INDIAN AIR FORCE.

BELOVED HUSBAND OF ISABELLE
AND FATHER OF NICOLE

BORN 10TH JUNE 1945
DIED IN ACTION ON THE 14TH DEC 1971
IN THE INDO-PAKISTAN WAR

THE GOLDEN GATES STOOD WIDE OPEN
ON THAT SAD DREARY INAUSPICIOUS DAY
SWIFTLY AND SILENTLY WITH FAREWELLS LEFT UNSPOKEN
SOFTLY AND PEACEFULLY YOU SUDDENLY SLIPPED AWAY
INSERTED BY :- HIS LOVING WIFE AND DARLING DAUGHTER

Laurie was awarded the Vir Chakra for displaying gallantry, determination and devotion to duty of a high calibre throughout. One of the few awards to Officers serving as Forward Air Controllers. Laurie Pereira happens to be the only IAF Officer killed in the line of duty as an FAC.

Postscript

Today, the location of LF Pereira has been lost due to neglect. The diocese of Jullunder (St Mary's Church) stopped using the RA Cemetery for Catholic burials, and the Cemetery suffered neglect, as a result of which, sadly, it is not possible to locate Flt Lt Pereira's grave today, even though the grave and the head-stones were solid marble, there was no trace of his grave. Last year, at the request of a senior Veteran friend of Wg Cdr Ravi mani, Lt Gen Dilip N. Desai, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (18 CAV), the GOC of 1 Armd Div sent across a search party to Jullunder to find Flt Lt Pereira's grave-sadly, the entire cemetery is in a shambles, and most of the grave stones and slabs are nowhere to be seen. The last resting place of a war hero is no longer known.

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Thursday, 02 April 2015 03:42

Written by Jagan Pillarisetti

Hits: 8524

Given below is the official list of aircraft losses in Pakistan to all causes, Combat, Non-Combat, Accidents, etc. The Indian Air Force and Army had claimed a total of 94 Aircraft as destroyed, against which less than half which are attributable to direct Indian Action are acknowledged. There were 51 airframe losses in Pakistan, roughly 80 % are from the Pakistan Air Force, the remaining being from the Pakistan Army, the Pakistan International Airlines and some other aircraft belonging to Neutral Countries. An Unusual Cause is the "self destruction to prevent capture by Indian Forces" of Eleven Sabres and Two T-33 Trainers in the Eastern Sector. However. Five of the Sabres were recovered and flown again by the Bangladesh Air Force.

	East	West	Total		
				Pakistan Air Force	42
PAF Aircraft Lost in the Air Combat	5	5	10	Pakistan Army Aviation	2
PAF Aircraft Lost to AA Fire	0	7	7	Pakistan International Airlines	2
PAF Aircraft Lost in Accidents	0	4	4	Other Bodies(Civ : 3, RCAF :1, USAF :1)	5
PAF Aircraft Dest in IAF Attacks	0	8	8	TOTAL	51
PAF Aircraft Destroyed by self	13	0	13		

.			
TOTAL PAF aircraft	18	24	42
Non PAF Aircraft lost in IAF Raids	4	2	6
Non PAF Aircraft.	1	2	3
TOTAL aircraft (All)	23	28	51

Aircraft Type Lost	East	West	Total
F-86 Sabre	16	12	28
F-104 Starfighter	0	3	3
MiG-19 (F-6)	0	4	4
T-33	2	0	2
B-57 Canberra	0	5	5

Miscellaneous	5	4	9
TOTAL	23	28	51

LISTING OF AIRCRAFT LOST DETAILS SECTOR WISE:

Eastern Sector					
		No	Unit	Pilot Name	Remarks
<22-Nov-71		<1		<F/L Parvez Mehdi Qureshi(PW)	Gnat F/L M A Ganapathy.
<22-Nov-71		<1		<F/O Khalil Ahmed(PW)	SD by GnatF/O D Lazarus
<04-Dec-71		<1		<W/C S M Ahmed (KIA)	
<04-Dec-71		<1		<F/L Saeed Afzal Khan (KIA)	
<04-Dec-71		<1		<F/O Sajjad Noor	
.					

<04-Dec-71		<1	<PIA	
<05-Dec-71		<3	Civilian	
<Undated		<1	<Army	
.				
<16-Dec-71		<11		
<16-Dec-71	<T-33	<2		
.				

Western Sector

		No	<Sqn	<Name	<Remarks
<04-Dec-71		<1	17 Sqn.	<F/L Nayyar Iqbal (KIA)	Flame out after TO from Shorkot

<05-Dec-71		<1	7 Sqn.	<S/L Khusro(KIA), S/L Peter Chisty(KIA)	
<05-Dec-71		<1	7 Sqn.	<S/L Ishfaq Hameed(KIA), F/L Zulfiqar Ahmed(KIA)	
<05-Dec-71		<1	7 Sqn.	<F/L Javed Iqbal(KIA), F/L G M Malik (KIA)	
<06-Dec-71		<1	9 Sqn.	S/L Amjad Hussain (PW)	
<07-Dec-71	MiG-19 (F-6)	<1	11 Sqn.	F/L Wajid Ali Khan (PW)	
<07-Dec-71		<1	15 Sqn.	<F/O Hamid Khawaja	Flame out during chase . Ejected
<07-Dec-71		<1	18 Sqn.	<S/L Cecil Choudhry	
<08-Dec-71		<1	26 Sqn.	<F/L Fazal Elahi (KIA)	

<08-Dec-71	MiG-19 (F-6)	<1	23 Sqn.	<F/O Afzal Jamal Siddiqui (KIA)	Flew through debris of Su-7, Accident
<10-Dec-71		<1	26 Sqn.	<S/L Aslam Choudhry (KIA)	SD by Hunter S/L R N Bharadwaj
<12-Dec-71		<1	9 Sqn.	<W/C M H Middlecoat (KIA)	
<12-Dec-71	MiG-19 (F-6)	<1	23 Sqn.	<F/L Ejazuddin	
<13-Dec-71		<1	19 Sqn.	<F/O N N A Baig (KIA)	SD by Hunter, Talhar by S/L F J Mehta
<17-Dec-71		<1	9 Sqn.	<F/L Samad Ali Changezi (KIA)	SD by MiG-21 Naya Chor, F/LA K Dutta
<17-Dec-71	MiG-19 (F-6)	<1	25 Sqn.	<F/O Shahid Raza (KIA)	
.					

<04-Dec-71		<1	<.	
<06-Dec-71		<1	<.	
<08-Dec-71		<5	<.	
<08-Dec-71		<1	<.	

<05-Dec-71 <1 <RCAF <Chaklala, Destroyed by Hunters

<05-Dec-71 <1 <USAF <Chaklala, Destroyed by Hunters

<08-Dec-71 <1 <Army

<10-Dec-71 <1 <PIA

.

Legend:

KIA : Killed in Action	PIA : Pakistan
FTR : Failed to Return	International Airlines.
AAA : Anti Aircraft	RCAF :Royal
Artillery	Canadian Airforce
NCR : Non Combat	USAF: United States
Related	Air Force.
Pt : Pilot	Civ : Civilian
SD : Shot Down	LMG : Light Machine
	Gun

Notes:**Acknowledgements:**

Special Thanks to VP, Tomas Polak of Czechoslovakia .

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Indian Air Losses of the 1971 War (Unofficial List)

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Thursday, 02 April 2015 03:40

Written by Jagan Pillarisetti

Hits: 8647

The Indian Air Force fought on two fronts during the 1971 War. Employing nearly 600 Combat aircraft ranging from New MiG-21 and Sukhoi-7s to the Vintage Harvards and Vampires, the IAF flew nearly 7500 Sorties during the duration of the

war. The Following is the list of Losses compiled by us through Various Sources published ever since. You will come up with some startling figures when you go through them, like finding out that 23 aircraft were lost in a matter of two days on both the fronts, or the High number of Hunter Losses. A surprising trend is the increase in attrition of the Canberra . The Losses are given first for the Eastern Sector and then for the Western Sector. Some of the Articles in the 71 War Section give details of the losses. The Figures given below were initially estimated as 61, However have been revised to 75 after the release of the Times of India's Official History of the 1971 War. For the sake of completeness, I have included figures of Army and Naval Aircraft losses also.

A Typewise Breakup is given as follows:

Figures in parenthesis are operational accidents.

MiG-21	2	6 (2)	8
Sukhoi -7	1	18(1)	19
Hunter	12 (3)	11(2)	23
Canberra	1	4 (1)	5
Gnat	-	3 (2)	3
Mystere IVa	-	5 (2)	5
HF-24	-	4	4
Vampire	-	1	1
Alize (Navy)	-	1	1
Dakota	1 (1)	-	1
AOP (Army)	-	1	1
Helicopters	2 (2)	2 (1)	4

Type of Loss	East	West	Total	% age
Anti Aircraft /Ground Fire	10	26	36	48 %
Air to Air Combat	3	15	18	30 %
Destroyed on Ground	-	2	2	2 %
Undetermined (Possible AAC)	-	2	2	1 %
Accidents.	6	11	17	22 %

DETAILS OF AIRCRAFT LOSSES IN THE EASTERN AND WESTERN SECTORS 1971.

EASTERN SECTOR							
Date	Aircraft	Sqn	Name of the Pilot	S.No	Location	Rem	Fate
04-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	221	Sqn Ldr V. Bhutani	.	Tejgaon	SD AAA Fire. Ejected,	POW [*]
04-Dec-71	Hunter	37	Sqn Ldr S B Samanta	BA252	Tejgaon	SD AAA Fire or F-86	killed

04-Dec-71	Hunter	37	Fg Off S G Khonde	BA266	Tejgaon	SD AAA Fire ?	killed
04-Dec-71	Hunter	14	Sqn Ldr K D Mehra	.	Tejgaon	SD F-86 0800 Hrs	Eject
04-Dec-71	Hunter	14	Flt Lt K C Tremenhre	.	Tejgaon	SD F-86 (Sqn Ldr Dilawar)	POW*
04-Dec-71	Hunter	7	Flt Lt A R Da Costa	BA295	Lal Munir Hat	SD AAA Cr in Indian Territory	killed
04-Dec-71	Hunter	7	Sqn Ldr S K Gupta	BA287	BaghdograAFB	Dam AAA Fire Ejected at base	Eject
06-Dec-71	MiG-21	4	Sqn Ldr Rao	.	Gauhati	AAA Fire - Ran out of fuel	Eject
07-Dec-71	Hunter	-	-	.	Dum Dum AFB	Dam AAA Fire Ejected at base	Eject
10-Dec-71	Hunter	14	Sqn Ldr R C Sachdeva	BA275	Hilli Region	SD AAA	killed

10-Dec-71	Hunter	-	-	.	Lal Munir Hat	SD AAA Pt Rescued in EP	Eject
10-Dec-71	Hunter	-	-	.	CoochBiharAF	Dest in Crash Landing	Safe
11-Dec-71	Mil Mi-4	-	-	.	Aijal	Onboard fire Aijal from Agartala	Safe
12-Dec-71	MiG-21	28	Sqn Ldr P.S.Gill	.	Agartala	SD AAA Ejected at EP	Eject
12-Dec-71	Hunter	-	-	.	HashimaraAF B	Crashed after TO	Safe
12-Dec-71	Hunter	14	-	.	JessoreAFB	Dest in Crash Landing	Safe
15-Dec-71	Canberra	16	Fg Off B R E Wilson(Pt)	.	Tejgaon	SD AAA Flt Lt R B Mehta (Nav)	killed
15-Dec-71	Mil Mi-4	-	-	.	Agartala	Trasmission Failure Cr Agartala	Safe

17-Dec-71	Dakota	43	Flt Lt J D'Souza + Five	BJ662	Mechuka	Accident	killed
Grand losses		19 Known Losses (6 Operational Accidents)					
Unattributed Pilots: Hunter (5) : Flt Lt L H Dixon (Date Reason Not Known) Mi-4 (2) : None Available							
WESTERN SECTOR							
Date	Aircraft	Sqn	Name of the Aircrew	S.No	Location	Remarks	Fate
04-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	101	Flt Lt J Rishi	B 899	AdampurAF B	Tyreburst on TO. Crashed	killed
04-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	222	Flt Lt H V Singh	B 849	Risalawala	SD F-6 (Flt Lt Latif)	killed
04-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	222	Flt Lt P N Saksena	.	-	AAA fire Counter Air Mission	Eject
04-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	101	Flt Lt Gurdip Singh	.	Chamb	AAA Dam Ejected Tac Supp	Eject
04-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	108	Flt Lt D R Natu	B 854	Indian terr	AAA Dam Ejected Pt safe	Eject

04-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	32	Flt Lt M S Grewal	.	Shorkot AFB	SD AAA 1400 Hrs	PO W
04-Dec-71	Hunter	-	-	-	-	AAA Fire CrL at BAs	?
04-Dec-71	Hunter	27	Fg Off V Chati	A 479	Mianwali	SD F-6 (Fg Off Qazi Javed)	PO W
04-Dec-71	Hunter	20	Flt Lt K P Muralidharan	A 462	N Peshawar	SD F-86 (F/O S B Mirza)	killed
04-Dec-71	Hunter	27	Fg Off S Tyagi	A 490	Murid AFB	SD F-86 (F/Lt Mujahid)	killed
04-Dec-71	HF-24	220	Flt Lt P V Apte	D1193	Nayachor	SD AAA	killed
04-Dec-71	HF-24	220	Flt Lt J L Bhargava	.	Nayachor	SD AAA	PO W
04-Dec-71	Canberra	JBCU	Flt Lt L M Sasoon (Pt) Flt Lt R M Advani (Nav)	IF916	Sargodha	SD MirageIII (F/O Naeem Ata)	killed

05-Dec-71	Canberra	5	Flt Lt S K Goswami (Pt) Flt Lt S C Mahajan (Nav)	IF960 / IF899	.	SD AAA Night of 4/5 Dec	killed
05-Dec-71	Allouette	-	-	-	SrinagarAFS	SD F-86? Pts Injured	Safe
05-Dec-71	Mystere	3	Flt Lt A V Pethia	IA 954	Bhawalnagar	SD AAA 071 5 Hrs	POW
05-Dec-71	Hunter	20	Sqn Ldr J M Mistry	A1014	Sakesar	SD MirageIIIs (Fg Off Safdar)	killed
05-Dec-71	Hunter	27	Flt Lt G S Rai	A 482	Sakesar	SD F-6 (W/C S Hatmi)123 5 Hrs	killed
05-Dec-71	Hunter	27	Fg Off K L Malkani	A 488	Sakesar	SD F-6 (F/O S Raza) 1235 Hrs	killed
05-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	32	Flt Lt V V Tambey	B 839	Shorkot AFB	SD AAA 135 0 Hrs	killed
05-Dec	MiG-21	29	Flt Lt Harish Singhji	C 764	Suleimanke	SD AAA 153 0 Hrs	POW

-71							
05-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	26	Sqn Ldr D S Jafa	B 891	E of Lahore	SD AAA 155 5 Hrs	PO W
05-Dec-71	Canberra	35	Flt Lt S C Sandal (Pt) Flt Lt K S Nanda (Nav)	IF923	Sargodha	SD AAA	killed
06-Dec-71	Gnat	-	-	-	Uttarlai AF	WO during Landing	Safe
06-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	222	Fg Off K C Kuruvilla	B 854	Jassar Bridge	SD AAA 1025 Hrs.	PO W
06-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	101	Flt Lt V K Wahi	B 868	.	SD ,possibly by F-86.	killed
06-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	101	Flt Lt J Bhattacharya	.	Chamb	SD 1225 Hrs.	Eject
Dec-71	Mystere	3	.	.	Haveli	Engine Failure	Eject
07-Dec	Sukhoi-7	26	Sqn Ldr Jiwa Singh	B 902	.	SD F-6 (Fg Off Atiq Sufi)	killed

-71							
07-Dec-71	Gnat	9	Fg Off M M Singh	.	.	Cr on Ferry flight lost control.	killed
08-Dec-71	MiG-21	45	Sqn Ldr Denzil Keelor	.	Chamb	SD AAA	Eject
08-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	TACD E	Flt Lt R G Kadam	B 910	Risalawala	SD F-86 (W/C M H Hashmi)	killed
08-Dec-71	Hunter	7	Wg Cdr B A Coelho	BA329	Suleimanke	SD AAA 1200 Hrs Hasilpur	PO W
08-Dec-71	Mystere	3	.	.	Haveli	SD AAA Amruka	Eject
09-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	32	Flt Lt N Shanker	B 860	NW Amritsar	SD AAA	killed
09-Dec-71	HF-24	10	Sqn Ldr A V Kamat	BD859	Hyderabad.	SD AAA at Kotri,	PO W
10-Dec	Hunter	27	Sqn Ldr M K Jain	A 938	Chamb	SD AAA	killed

-71							
10-Dec-71	Alize	310	Lt Cdr Ashok Roy (Pt) Lt H S Sirohi (Obs) Acmm O Vijayan (TG)	IN203	Arabian Sea.	SD F-104 (W/C Arif Iqbal)	killed
10-Dec-71	Sukhoi-7	26	Flt Lt Dilip Parulkar	.	Zafarwal	SD AAA	POW

Notes:

1. Entries marked with "?" in the remarks column are not confirmed by secondary sources.

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Air Battles - December 1971 - My experiences

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Thursday, 02 April 2015 03:30

Written by Wg Cdr Salim Beg Mirza (PAF)

Hits: 5913

A Pakistani pilot narrates two of his air combat experiences in which his Indian opponents gave him a tough fight against all odds. Wg. Cdr. Baig's account includes details on the last flight Indian Air Force's only PVC recipient, Flying Officer Nirmal Jit Singh Sekhon.

Before December '71, I was posted as Instructor Pilot at Pakistan Air Force Academy, Risalpur. In October '71 I was attached to fly the Sabre with No.26 Squadron based at Peshawar. It was the unit where I had flown this type of aircraft for more than two years prior to beginning my stint at the Academy. I had flown more than 1000 hours on the Sabre, a truly fighter pilot's aeroplane and had loved every moment of it. On 01 December 1971 I had ferried an F-86F from Peshawar to a PAF Base near Karachi in the South.

On December 3rd, I was returning from Karachi to Peshawar via Lahore by an afternoon flight of PIA Boeing 707 landing at Lahore about four in the evening. It was in the transit lounge that I met Sqn. Ldr. S.M. Anwar who was also traveling by the same flight as official courier with some secret documents. It was at Lahore that we came to know about the outbreak of the air war between Pakistan and India and PAF's first air strike that evening against Indian Air Force bases.



The author of the article, Flt. Lt. Salim Baig, PAF during the 1971 War.

Our flight to Peshawar was cancelled and we were left stranded at Lahore Airport. On our insistence the PIA authorities made arrangements for us to travel to Peshawar by road and we left Lahore in a van at eight in the night. It was a torturous and tiring journey because the van's lights had to be kept off throughout as complete black out was being observed en-route. We were even mobbed at one or two places whenever the driver tried to switch on the lights to see the road. We reached PAF Officer's Mess Peshawar at about six in the morning of December 4th and after changing into my flying gear I headed straight for my squadron. I was keen to get into the action because I had already missed the opportunity of taking part in the first strike to Srinagar airfield.

Soon after reaching the squadron, I witnessed a [raid at 0715 a.m.](#) by IAF Hunter aircraft who caused no damage except destroying two dummy aircraft on the tarmac

with strafing attack. It was after this raid that we were instructed by the Base Commander to man two additional Air Defence Alert (ADA) F-86 Sabres parked in the pens at the beginning of Runway 17. Flight Lieutenant Khalid Razzak went to his aircraft in nearby pen and myself as No.2 took up the position in the cockpit of aircraft No.412, a silver coloured non-camouflaged bird loaded with 1800 rounds in six .50 machine guns which had been harmonized with A-4 gun sight. The aircraft were pre-flighted and after entering the cockpit, switches were set up, parachute harnesses tightened and ejection seat and rudder pedals adjusted according to my height and leg length. Electrical cable of ground power unit was connected with the airplane for quick fire and start.

Excitement was running high in anticipation of action with the enemy aircraft who had dared us and thrown up a challenge with first strike. But it was seemingly an unending wait of more than two and half hours in the cockpit. During this waiting period all sorts of questions came to my mind. Will the IAF aircraft again attack our base? Will we get a scramble in time to intercept? Will it be a futile wait? Will some other pilots replace us before we launched into action etc. etc? Finally we were ordered to scramble at [about 1030 hours](#). Engines were started, canopies were closed and we were airborne in less than three minutes. Radar controller asked us to climb to 5000 ft and head for Cherat Hills about 30 miles in south easterly direction.

We had barely flown for two to three minutes in that direction when we were asked by the Controller to go back to base since the raiders were nearing the airfield for attack. We immediately turned around and flew in westerly direction for base and while doing so we heard "Killer Control" (ground observer) that the airfield was under attack by Hunter aircraft who were seen heading in easterly direction towards Peshawar town. At that time I was on the left of leader in battle formation about 3-4000 ft abreast position and was looking down for the enemy aircraft, one of which was spotted well below us at low height heading in opposite direction. I called out his position to the leader who acknowledged it and we did a hard turn about to go in the direction of the enemy aircraft.

But as we rolled out, we again heard the 'Killer Control' informing us that Hunters were pulling up for another attack. On hearing this we turned in westerly direction for the airfield and as a preparatory measure for engagement I called out to the leader to jettison our external fuel tanks. I followed my call with action and soon felt my aircraft buck up as two 200 gallons fuel tanks leapt away from the wings and disappeared in the winter haze below us.

We were now almost overhead the base and I spotted one Hunter turning to the left across the runway well below me. I informed the leader who had also sighted him and saw Flight Lieutenant Khalid Razzak's Sabre diving to position himself behind the enemy aircraft. While looking to the right, I cautioned him about the presence of other enemy aircraft and sure enough there was another Hunter who had seen the lead Sabre diving and was turning left to sneak behind the Sabre. I immediately called leader about this new development and told him that I was going for the second Hunter who was still more than a mile behind.

Diving and throttling back, I got behind the second Hunter who had apparently not seen me. Pretty soon an interesting situation had developed in which four fighter jets were twisting and manoeuvring in high 'g' turns at barely 100 feet above rugged terrain west of Peshawar airfield and were jockeying to shoot each other out of the sky¹.

People watching the fight from the ground could see the fighters in a tight high 'g' turn at low level with one Hunter in front of lead Sabre firing at him and a second Hunter following and firing at the lead Sabre and I being the last one had this Hunter in my gun sight and was firing with all guns blazing. I was hoping to shoot him before he got dangerously close to the leader. During this melee I was giving a running commentary to the leader about the distance of enemy aircraft behind him. I could clearly see the puffs of dust being raised by impact of bullets of both Sabre and Hunter in front of me. Their bullets were landing well short of the target because of firing out of gun range.

While firing at the enemy aircraft I was getting closer in range but in spite of my bullets hitting the target, there was no sign of smoke or fire. The Hunter was proving to be a tough nut to crack. I was aware that the Hunter's distance from leader's aircraft was becoming less and could be fatal if not warned in time. I, therefore, told leader to 'Break' - a manoeuvre performed by fighter aircraft to avoid extreme danger. At the same time my bullets showed their effect and the Hunter aircraft started to emanate thick smoke from the right side of its fuselage and wing root and the next instant I saw him hitting the ground. A mushroom of thick black smoke and fire leapt up at the point of impact. The pilot had no chance of ejecting out of the aircraft and was instantly killed.

Since the leader (Flt. Lt. Khalid Razzak) had broken off from his attack and I was looking down at the fallen aircraft, the first Hunter rolled out in south easterly direction and with full throttle managed to make good his escape. We flew in the

general direction of his escape route but could not sight him and he was lucky to have survived. After patrolling the airspace for sometime we landed back and were told that the air-battle had been anxiously watched by PAF personnel at the base till the time it got so low that they could not see us anymore except hear the guns rattling followed by an explosion and cloud of black smoke.

Later it came to our knowledge through IAF war history that Flt. Lt. Khalid Razzak had damaged the other Hunter who managed to land at under construction runway of Jammu airfield in Kashmir².

My second kill of the War was a Gnat fighter interceptor aircraft flying out of Srinagar airfield in Kashmir Valley on 14 December 1971. I was flying as No.5 leading a pair of F-86F Sabres to escort a formation of four other Sabres carrying two 500 lbs. Mk.84 bombs under each wing to crater the main runway 13/31. The overall leader of our formation of six aircraft was Wing Commander S.A. Changezi. We took off from Peshawar airbase in early morning hours and set course in easterly direction with escort pair on the right side of the formation. Myself and No.6 (Flight Lieutenant A. Rahim Yousefzai) carried no external loads except two 200 gallons fuel tanks. On the way to the picturesque Kashmir Valley we flew close to Murree hill station and a few minutes later we crossed the mountain peaks short of the valley and accelerated down hill towards our pull up point which was about three miles short and to the South East of our target. Our gun master switches had already been put in Armed position to prepare for firing with just one press of the red trigger on the control stick.

The target (runway) was easily sighted to the left during pull up to the bombing height of 5000 feet above ground. Everyone in the formation acknowledged having visual contact with the runway and soon I saw the leader's Sabre roll into a nose down steep turn to align up his aircraft with runway 31. He was followed by No.2, 3 and 4 and as No.4 dived for his bombing run, I along with my wing-man fell behind him to position ourselves for providing him cover. Leader and No.2 had already dropped their bombs on the target and had pulled out of the ensuing dive at about 1000 feet above ground. Before we could complete our positioning turns, I heard leader telling No.2 to immediately 'Break' to the left because there was an enemy Gnat aircraft firing at him. Leader and No.2 commenced a tight left turn to avoid the danger and No.3 (Flight Lieutenant Amjad Endrabi) after pulling out of the bombing run spotted them and manoeuvred to get behind the Gnat. No.4 had in the meantime completed his bombing dive and having no visual contact with the other formation members decided to leave the battle area.

I then asked No.6 (my wingman) to jettison the external fuel tanks and headed in the direction of the fight which had developed within visual and hearing distance west of the airfield. Because of high 'G' turns No.2 had depleted his speed and was unable to sustain manoeuvring energy for the fight. He, therefore, decided to roll out and leave the scene of action by turning away to the right. No.3 had by this time taken position behind the Gnat and had commenced firing with his guns.

He also announced on the radio that he was going to shoot him down. I along with No 6 (my wingman) had picked them up below us and had settled into an orbit on top at about 3-4000 feet higher. We could see the three aircraft in a tight circle with Gnat being in front, a Sabre (No.3) behind him who was followed by another Sabre (leader) at a height of about 200 feet above the ground. I was expecting the matter to be over in a short while because No.3 was well placed within gun range behind the Gnat. After a few seconds I heard No.3 calling that he was 'Winchester' which meant that he had run out of ammo and his guns had stopped firing after missing the target in front.

At that time I saw the Gnat momentarily roll his wings level to jettison his under wing tanks and then he went into a high 'G' turn with renewed vigour to manoeuvre behind the lead Sabre. Within a couple of turns I could see the distance closing between the two and before he closed in dangerously I decided to get into the act. At the same time I heard *an anxious call from the leader asking me to come down and relieve them of this imminent threat.*

I asked my wingman to get into fighting position and then dove down manoeuvring my aircraft to get into the orbit of the fighters below. In a matter of few seconds, I was behind the Gnat and firing from a close range of about 1000 feet. In a three seconds burst from my Sabre's six machine-guns firing at the rate of 120 round per seconds, I hit him square and thick black smoke started coming out from under his fuselage belly. The Gnat levelled his wings and headed for the airfield as if to indicate that for him the fight was over. I stopped firing at him and saw the canopy of his cockpit fly away from the aircraft. But the very next moment the Gnat snapped over inverted on its back and crashed into the undulated ground of the valley, killing the pilot.

Keeping a good look out for other enemy aircraft we joined up in battle formation and proceeded back to our base at Peshawar. As we climbed out of the valley we could hear our radar controllers calling us frantically to find out about our safety and outcome of the fight. They were much relieved when told that we were all safe and flying back after shooting down an Indian Gnat.

The Indian pilot, Fg. Off. Nirmal Jit Singh Sekhon³ put up a brave fight and was awarded Param Vir Chakra - the highest gallantry award of Indian Armed Forces (equivalent to our Nishan-e-Haider). Detailed interviews of the Srinagar Base Commander, Squadron Commander, Squadron Pilots and close relatives including his wife were broadcast by All India Radio who provided more information about their side of the story. He was No 2 in a formation of two Gnats who had been scrambled to intercept us but he had been delayed by two to three minutes at take off point after his leader got airborne. The air battle had been anxiously watched from the Control Tower by the Base Cdr & Sqn Cdr and in his radio communication, the Gnat pilot had informed them about being hit. He was advised to head for base but that was the last they heard from him. His aircraft wreckage was discovered in a gorge near the road coming from Srinagar town to the base. We never saw the Gnat leader's aircraft anywhere around the battle area.

Notes:

. The Indian Pilots were Fg. Off. K.P. Muralidharan and Sqn Ldr Bajpai from No.20 Squadron. Both aircraft were flying at extreme range with no fuel allowance for air combat and attacking a target that was already alerted by an earlier raid by aircraft from the same squadron.

. Sqn. Ldr. Bajpai who was flying this aircraft was diverted to land at Jammu airfield as he did not have enough fuel to reach Pathankot. Jammu's runway was still under construction and Bajpai skillfully landed his damaged Hunter onto the runway which proved to be too short. His aircraft fell off the end of a runway onto a Truck carrying construction material. The Hunter was recovered.

Fg. Off. Nirmal Jit Sekhon for his courageous feat of taking on Six of the Sabres even though outnumbered six to one, was awarded India's Highest Gallantry Award, the Param Vir Chakra by our government.

Acknowledgments: Reproduced with the kind permission of [Defence Journal](#)

Plane Tails From The IAF : The Pathankot Raid Of Dec 10

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Thursday, 02 April 2015 03:28

Written by Air Marshal K D K Lewis

Hits: 5656

The PAF raids Pathankot again! The attack is immortalised in a dramatic painting - but the real truth is otherwise!

An earlier article, "[In and Out of the Cockpit](#)", recounted the experience of a daylight attack by Mirage IIIs of PAF, on Pathankot airfield at 1515hrs on 9th December 1971. The accompanying sound and light show was terrifying particularly to the two MiG 21 pilots, Sqn Ldrs Keith Lewis and Janak Kapur, lining up in their aircraft on the southern dumbbell for take-off. That both pilots survived unscathed with both aircraft undamaged was fortuitous, despite claims to the contrary by the Mirage formation. However, this is an account of the next and, for the record, the last daylight raid by PAF on Pathankot at 1118 hrs on the very next day, viz the 10th December 1971.

The Painting

The author, then Sqn Ldr Keith Lewis, is prompted to record the sequence of events, from the notes in his war diary, because after the "In & Out of the Cockpit" article was published by Mr. Pulak Sen in his magazine Indian Aviation dated April 14th, 2006, and then put on the Air Force website by Gp Capt Kapil Bhargava, the latter sent Keith a photograph of an oil painting, which is attached, occupying, presumably, pride of place in Army Staff College, Quetta, Pakistan.

This depicts Sqn Ldr Akhtar Rao, leader of the 6 aircraft formation of Mirage IIIs of 5 Sqn, Sargodha, pulling up over two burning Hunters destroyed on the runway by him in the course of the attack. Two kills were obviously credited to him, but whether or not this has ever been refuted by Wg Cdr Y P Mehta, OC 27 Sqn, occupant of the lead Hunter, or his wingman, whose name cannot be readily recalled, is not known. The compulsion, therefore, for the author to record the events of those few minutes of that fateful day is overwhelming, because, he was actually an eye witness to the entire event from alarmingly close range and knows that, except for a nick in the port drop tank of No.1's aircraft, both aircraft were undamaged.

It all started at about 1115 hrs when Keith Lewis, the Detachment Commander of the "MiG Club", as the 45 Sqn Det was called, climbed out from the Operations Readiness Room (ORR) into the warm sunlight of a cold, windy, north Indian winter day- whether for a breath of fresh air or to stretch his legs, he doesn't now remember. The flying programme for the day was on the board, the serviceability of the MiG 21s was good, and the morning sorties had been flown successfully. This included a 4 aircraft combat air patrol at a place called Samba where the Army apprehended a dawn attack after an intercepted message suggested undue PAK interest in the Indian Army Formation HQs located there. Or, perhaps, he felt it was time to chat with the ground crew most of who were actually living in the blast pens.

The photograph below shows a motley crowd not exactly as presentable as would be desirable for a Monday morning parade, but a more determined lot would be difficult to find. The airmen had moved out of the billets allotted to them on the 6th of December 1971 because a stray bomb, from a B-57 night raid, had rendered their living quarters somewhat uncomfortable to live in. This, to their credit, only served to strengthen their will to do their job. The 'Chiefy' is unmistakable in the snap and Keith continues to remember him with respect for a job well done under the most trying conditions. The next photograph shows the pilots and engineering officer of the "MiG Club", as equally a motley crowd as the ground crew.

Anyway, regarding the sortie over Samba, though not part of this "plane tail", it was rather interesting. Four MiG 21s streamed onto the runway and took off individually at, perhaps, anything from 10 to 20 seconds intervals and, in the poor light conditions of pre-dawn, Nos 2, 3, & 4s promptly lost contact with the aircraft ahead as the afterburner of the aircraft in front was switched off. Sqn Ldr "Stones" Sonpar who was the No 3 broke RT silence to inform Keith Lewis, the leader, of the general predicament. A gathering turn to port with nav lights on was thrown and after some jostling the formation joined up in low level tactical, the then well known Finger Four Formation, and set course for Samba. On arrival, a most inhospitable welcome was accorded to the 4 MiGs.

The army, which was expecting aerial visitors, obviously mistook the MiGs for enemy aircraft and opened up with all they had, including, as we came to know later, small arms fire. The air was thick with streaks of colour, flashes of explosions, puffs of smoke and expressive expletives on RT. The MiGs promptly stepped up to 3 kms for safety bringing them within the gaze of Pak radar. The element of surprise was lost.

The leader thought to himself, in a fit, perhaps, of pique to address the PAF on RT, *"Where's Wingco Alam? Send him up. Lets have 30 seconds over Samba with him"*.

Those of us who remember John Fricker's article on the PAF and the story of "Thirty Seconds over Sargodha" in the 1965 war which describes the shooting down of 4 Hunters in quick succession by WingCo Alam over Sargodha will get the connection, as it was hoped, the PAF also would! Thereafter, it became almost an SOP to "whistle up" WingCo Alam on RT whenever possible. For the record, of the 4 Hunters of 7 Sqn claimed to have been shot down by Wingco Alam all but two returned safely to base and the entries in the 7 Sqn Authorisation Book are there to prove it. Perhaps a member of the formation, or 7 Sqn itself can, for the record, collaborate this.

The Mirage Attack - Take Two

Anyway, to get back to the Mirage attack of the 10th December 1971, Keith Lewis was about to climb into the Ambassador car allotted for his use when 2 Hunters taxied past him onto the dumbbell and proceeded to line up on the runway opposite the ORR. Both Hunters had 2 drop tanks and Keith wondered to himself where on earth in Pakistan they were off to; 2 tankers can really travel and he also wondered why only 2 aircraft? Anyhow, he paused and turned around to watch them line up in that manner compulsive to all pilots, so nicely described by Nevil Shute in one of his books - the entire process has to be watched until the aircraft are literally out of sight.

Both Hunters were on the runway when out of the blue, without any warning, two Mirage IIIs of the PAF thundered overhead followed in quick succession by another two. In those few seconds of time all hell seemed to have broken loose. One actually has to be in the midst of an air attack, literally sitting on the target, to realise the deadly effect of the din of exploding bombs, the deafening sound of 30 mm cannon and the upheaval of earth and flying debris. The sight of enemy aircraft heading straight for one with clear intent to kill can be the most dreadful experience. Death stares one in the face.

The first reaction was to "hit the deck" and from that ignominious and prone position Keith was made a ringside spectator and eye witness to a PAF Mirage III raid on Pathankot airfield. The previous afternoon he himself was in exactly the same position, i.e., he was in the lead MiG 21 of a 2 aircraft formation lined up for take off but that story has already been recorded elsewhere. Both Hunters stayed put on the runway and there was a sense of a third pair of Mirages screaming overhead at tree top height, but whether they had also attacked the airfield or not it was difficult to assess.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack Keith, still flat on the ground, saw fuel streaming from the port drop tank of the leader's Hunter and could hear the sound of a running Rolls Royce engine. In that instant, fearing the worst, he jumped up and ran onto the runway towards both Hunters, propelled by a dreadful fear, unmentionable and unthinkable, regarding the fate of both pilots. It was merely a matter of seconds for him to reach the spot and take in the situation - No. 2 was alive and appeared to be unhurt. His canopy was open and it seemed that he had switched off the engine. No 1 was sitting motionless in the cockpit with the canopy closed and the familiar sound of a jet engine came from his aircraft. Keith's wild gesticulating at him brought a response but the canopy remained closed. The next reaction was with regard to the

fuel streaming from the port drop tank of No. 1's aircraft and the imminent danger of the aircraft catching fire.

By this time the MiG ground crew had emerged from the underground ORR and onto the scene. A more welcome sight was hard to imagine. With their help both Hunters were pushed off the runway. Both pilots got out of their aircraft and were taken into the MiG ORR for a cup of hot tea and comradely reassurance that all was well. The Hunter leader turned out to be Wg Cdr Y P Mehta, OC 27 Sqn AF but, regrettably, Keith doesn't recollect the name of the wingman. The lead Hunter had taken debris damage on the port drop tank and continued to stream fuel. The thought that came to mind was that the good old Mystere drip tray would have come in handy.

Regarding the attack itself, the runway was badly cratered, slightly off centre, about a 1000 yards up, and so was the parallel taxi track. In the underground ORR there was a phone call for Keith from Air Cmde "Baba" Katre. He politely enquired that if Keith wasn't doing anything would he meet him on the dumbbell in about five minutes. Keith, of course, was there when the Air Cmde's jeep, which he was driving himself, drew up and he promptly accepted the invitation to jump in. A very detailed inspection of the runway and taxi-track followed and, to the credit of the PAF Mirage formation, it must be stated for the record that they had taken out both the runway and the parallel taxi-track. The damage seemed to have been caused by a single bomb each on the runway and taxi-track uprooting the concrete slabs and much earth at the point of contact. The size of the craters would correspond to perhaps what a 250 lb bomb was capable of creating. Of course, Keith was not an expert at that level of damage assessment, so this was merely a tentative guess.

There were other craters and upheavals of earth in the vicinity but these were of little or no consequence other than being of nuisance value to the Military Engineering Service, MES, whose employees would have to level the shoulders of the runway and taxi-track. The real job was to put the runway back into use, in the time stipulated in peace time, by the Runway Rehabilitation Task Force of the MES, who were shortly to rumble onto the scene with a long convoy of about 30 or 40 vehicles of various sizes, shapes and uses. It was quite a sight to behold! Also, a 2 aircraft MiG 21 Combat Air Patrol was whistled up from Adampur, which was to provide cover until the Pathankot runway was fit for operations again. The buzz of activity on the runway continued at a feverish pace for a few hours with professionally curious onlookers watching the progress, the most prominent of whom were the Officer I/C Flying and the SATCO; the latter would have to inspect the runway and declare it fit for use.

And now, of course, to return to the crux of this "Plane Tail" - both the Hunter Mk 56 aircraft of No 27 Sqn AF were started up and taxied back to their dispersal area. No one was then to know that Sqn Ldr Akhtar Rao, leader of the Mirage formation, would claim and be credited with having destroyed both Hunters on the ground, and that the official artist for the PAF, Air Commodore SMA Hussaini, would immortalise this claim in an oil painting now hanging in the hallowed corridors of the Quetta Army Staff College, Pakistan. That's how history is recorded!

Credit where its due!

While it is ungentlemanly between fighter pilots to denigrate another's performance, it is necessary for this claim to be unequivocally debunked for posterity. No offence is meant to Sqn Ldr Akhtar Rao whose formation otherwise did an excellent job! I would give my eye-teeth to have been the leader of an IAF formation to have taken out Sargodha runway and taxi track in like manner. But the fact remains and, that is the precise point of this "plane tail", that the painting does not depict the reality on the runway at Pathankot on 10th December 1971. Both Hunters survived, with a change of drop tank, to fly and fight another day.

What should happen to the painting? Staff College Quetta should decide. Of course, and undoubtedly, it would not be proper for the author to even suggest that the history of 5 Sqn PAF should be amended to record the factual situation of the 1118 hrs raid on Pathankot airfield on 10th December 1971 on the strength of this "plane tail". It is none of the author's business what PAF and 5 Sqn believe and record of the 1971 war, particularly so many years after the event, but the strange power of reality sooner or later enfolds us all in it's inexorable grip!

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Saga of Longewala

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

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Written by Air Marshal M S Bawa

Hits: 4317

SAGA OF LONGEWALA

**Air Marshal (retd.) M.S. Bawa, PVSM, AVSM, VM
From the Indian Air Force Journal, 1997**

Longewala will go down in the annals of warfare as a remarkable milestone where a handful of IAF pilots routed a formidable armoured thrust during the 1971 Indo-Pak War. It was indeed the IAF's finest hour, not withstanding what the Bollywood film, BORDER, depicts. When for the first time the IAF joined battle on the ground alone and won the offensive hands down. Here is the full account from the then-base commander of Jaisalmer. Another article on this Battle by Wg Cdr Suresh is at this [link](#)

Bursting of the Bubble

The bubble burst when Pakistan carried out a pre-emptive air strike at sunset on 3rd December 1971 on the airfields of Amritsar, Avantipur, Pathankot, Utterlai, Ambala, Agra, Nal and Jodhpur. Taking a leaf out of Moshe Dayan's book, the PAF evidently attempted to neutralize the IAF on the ground with a lightning air strike. it was at Longewala that the enemy made his biggest armoured thrust with a view to capture a large chunk of the Indian territory. The Pakistani thrust was blunted entirely by air action alone.

Hunter turns Hunted

In the early hours of 5th December 1971, a radio called the base commander, "This is Tiger, here (Maj. Gen. Khambata, GOC 12 Div). I suspect that an enemy armoured column is making rapid headway for Ramgarh. Our post at Longewala has heard tank noises throughout the night and seen tanks go past it with full headlights towards Ramgarh. I want your boys to investigate as early as possible." The Division Commander's voice on the radio was grave with anxiety.

While the aircrew were being put into the picture, the situation at Longewala was fast deteriorating. Enemy tanks carrying infantry elements had placed a ring around the post and had begun shelling it. Company Commander at the post was Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri.

Faced with this situation and being severely outnumbered and up against an armoured assault, he could at best appraise the Division of the magnitude of threat & clamour for help. He was advised to await the friendly Air Force at first light. Chandpuri kept low in his trench; a thin veil of darkness lay separating life from the death for all the besieged at this lonely outpost in the dark desert.

When the first two Hunters of the IAF arrived on the scene, the enemy was still shelling the post but was yet to hit any worthwhile target. The Hunters came low, scanning the road from Ramgarh; Flt. Lt. D.K. Dass and Fg. Off. R.C. Gosain with eyes peeled, guided by an Air Observation Post aircraft, found the enemy's T-59 tanks. The fight between the IAF and the Pakistani armour began.

They called up and picked on a tank which was closest to the area, not even 50 metres from Chandpuri's besieged post. "01 Alpha" entered the dive, put his aiming index on the tank and fired half his rockets. The tank lumbered a few meters in the sand, spit and ignited. "Bravo" yelled with joy. "You have got him Alpha! He is burning, the bastard!" He himself was getting into the firing range. He had picked on a tank near the helipad which was quite close to the post. He pressed the trigger for a short time and behold....that tank was shattering into splinters!

But even as these two aircraft were picking up and making their kills, the enemy on the ground was advancing. A few tanks had already reached the helipad, situated at the base of Longewala post. Mission 01 was running short of fuel and ammunition. If the small, but tactically important post at Longewala was to be held, the killing would have to continue. The kill could only be made from the air. For, our armour was nowhere at the scene, and Chandpuri had only one RCL shell! The race has now begun against time.

Back at base, every available skilled man was released from all other duties to help and turn the aircraft around in the shortest time possible. This was the only course of action open to the IAF in the area. As many tanks as possible had to be destroyed during the daylight hours, because if the enemy thrust was not completely foiled during the day time, the threat could assume menacing proportions at night and perhaps even threaten the airfield, as there were no anti-tank defences provided to this airbase.

Even as Mission 01 was turning towards home, yet another pair of aircraft flown by Bali and Yadav was on its way to the target area. The first pair claimed two tanks destroyed and five others damaged. The second mission engaged those menacing monsters on ground and continued till it had exhausted all its war loads. The pilots claimed two tanks destroyed and six damaged.

Any tanks set ablaze were claimed as destroyed and those crippled as damaged. The tanks were moving around in circles on the ground trying mainly to offer a moving

target to the enemy air and secondly to find protection in the cloud of dust that their movement raised. The effort was futile since the Indian fighter bombers had complete and unchallenged freedom of air.

Every pilot had to wait for his turn. This was the only sore point among the aircrew at Jaisalmer. So by the time Tully and Suresh got their turn, they were angry. When they ultimately went to attack, it was like attacking injured snakes. The tanks went writhing in circles and yet trying to sting with their anti-aircraft guns whenever the Hunters got near them.

In one, Suresh met the tank head on. Both the tank's and the aircraft's guns fired simultaneously. The aircraft, however won when its rockets hit and blew up the tank. The big flash that followed blinded Suresh for a moment. The pullout from the dive was momentarily delayed with the result that the aircraft scraped the ground with its tail but it continued to fly and was brought back safely to base. The mission claimed 3 tanks destroyed and 7 disabled.

When Tully and Gosain landed at 1400 hrs, they reported that after they had attacked three tanks that they spotted, they had to shift their attacks on to vehicles. This was the first indication that the panzer offensive had been successfully foiled. Only half a day had gone past.

Just then the Indian side, at the Longewala sector on 05 December 1971, intercepted a Pakistani message. An English translation of the message read,

"The enemy air force has been creating havoc - One aircraft leaves and another comes and stays overhead for twenty minutes. 40% troops and tanks have been destroyed, injured or damaged. Further advance has become very difficult. Send air force for help as soon as possible otherwise even a safe withdrawal would be difficult."



After the battle, Burnt out, stranded hulks of T-59 tanks of the Pakistani Army lying in the desert sands of Longewala

By the time the last mission over Longewala had completed its attack, the enemy force lay in shambles. The enemy's morale had evidently been completely shattered. With the plans of over running Longewala, Ramgarh and then capturing Jaisalmer airfield foiled, the enemy's morale was at its lowest ebb. It is more than a mere conjecture that the enemy, never in his wildest dreams, could have imagined that the small air contingent of the IAF positioned at Jaisalmer would destroy their powerful armoured thrust.

There was no dispute that every single piece of armour and supporting vehicle which lay destroyed, crippled, burned or shattered were purely the result of air action. A prime factor beside absence of air opposition, was the absence of our own troops in the area. Their presence would have induced the problem of recognition and consequently delayed launching of missions in quick succession as was actually achieved in this situation. So the otherwise undesirable factor actually proved to be a blessing in disguise under these circumstances.

The last mission found the enemy dragging his feet on the sandy track leading back to Ghabbar in Pakistan. To make the retreat difficult and deprive the enemy of much needed vehicles, APCs and armour, these were hit all along the track back to Ghabbar. The vehicles lay burning, bogged and abandoned. The enemy prayed for darkness to come, but the sun continued to set the bloody sands of desert ablaze for a much longer time than elsewhere - that's why deserts are deserts.

The action during the daytime, in addition to blunting the enemy attack, provided valuable time to the Divisional Commander to reformulate his plans and effect the redeployment of troops. As the day ended, the air ops and the Company at Longewala confirmed that 20 tanks and a large number of vehicles had been destroyed or damaged by the Air Force. The performance of a handful of gallant pilots had saved the day. The gratitude was most aptly worded in the message received at base from the Divisional Commander, Major General R.F. Khambatta at 10:00 P.M. on 05 December 71.

The message read,

"Personal from GOC for Base Cdr(.) We had excellent cooperation and support today(.) Shooting by your boys had been most accurate resulting in destroying number of enemy tanks and blunting the attack(.) Please convey my appreciation and that of my troops to the pilots(.) Congratulations on excellent performance(.)"

Even as the Jaisalmer element was preparing for the night, a telephone call was received from the Div. Cdr. who said that it was his personal appreciation of the situation whereby he highlighted the possibility of the enemy making a likely thrust against Jaisalmer airfield, bypassing Ramgarh with whatever was left of his armoured forces in the area - roughly a squadron strength of tanks. This was more likely to be resorted to if the enemy had a determined commander.

Tension mounted as the night advanced. Then at 0437 hrs on December 6, Major Atma Singh reported from Ranau that a bomber raid was heading for Jaisalmer airfield at low level. The guns reacted very fast. Although only a silhouette could be seen by the bursting ack-ack, the aircraft was noted to have put on bank and turned sharply away before entering the airfield boundary.

Goofy was the first one to take to air on the morning of December 6th. His task was to check all routes leading to Jaisalmer for any enemy intrusion, specially the routes leading from Shagarh Bulge, as these approaches had remained unguarded. He flew low into the area and checked and rechecked every suspicious object which looked like the enemy and found no trace of him. With a mixed feeling of happiness and disappointment, he proceeded towards Longewala sector, on his second part of the mission - interdiction of the retreating enemy and bring back information regarding his whereabouts for subsequent missions.

The next recce was carried out in the area Sadewal-Sandh-Ghabbar-Longewala, with a view to check if the enemy was attempting a hook from Sandh to Tanot trying to surprise our troops in this area. No trace of the enemy was found and it was rightly assumed that he was still licking his wounds near Longewala on the Longewala-Ghabbar axis.

The mission attacked and destroyed vehicle concentrations near Ghabbar. The pilots, during their debriefing, reported that Ghabbar appeared to be the administrative echelon of the enemy. Disabled tanks lay all along from Khari Tar to Longewala. The tanks appeared to have been charred and abandoned.

The battle of Longewala in fact was over now. Longewala in this district of Jaisalmer of Rajasthan became the graveyard of Pakistani armour. As was expected, Pakistan met its Waterloo here. This was because the IAF took timely and decisive action before the thrust could assume menacing proportions. Emboldened by their experience of 1965 War, Pakistan mounted one of its biggest offensives on our positions at

Longewala with a fleet of about 45 tanks and an Infantry Brigade. When the curtain came down, 37 of these tanks were accounted for, not to mention the innumerable APC's and vehicles that lay scattered all over the area.

Impact of Longewala Battle on other fronts

On the other hand the most significant fallout and the contribution of air operation was that it frustrated General Tikka Khan's planned offensive in the Ganga Nagar sector with his 'Strike Force South'. This destruction resulted in splitting up of 33 Inf. Div. of Pakistan, as the 18th Division at Longewala needed reinforcement on an emergency basis.

33 Inf. Div. was part of General Tikka Khan's 'Strike Force South', its depletion put an end to his planned offensive into the Ganga Nagar Sector for good, which otherwise might have alter the course of war in the west and might have also caused extensive destruction and bloodshed.

Churchill's now famous eulogy is aptly applicable to our pilots at Longewala when he said "...Never before...have so many owed so much to so few." I am told that a BSF post now at Longewala has kept a war diary which gives a vivid account of the battle and sums up by saying that the BSF repulsed the armoured thrust with little support from the air force!

This reminds me of a famous saying from John F. Kennedy, "Victory has hundred fathers, but defeat is an orphan!" No wonder, BORDER also has a different tale to tell. In battle, truth seems to be the first casualty.

A Fighter Combat Leader, Qualified Fighter Instructor and the first Squadron Commander of a Su-7 Squadron, Air Marshal "Mini" Bawa had commanded TACDE, Ambala & Jamnagar in addition to being the Air Attache in the UK and the Air & Ministry Adviser in Sweden. He retired as AOC-in-C, Central Air Command.

Shorkot Road Attack

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Thursday, 02 April 2015 03:13

Written by Air Marshal V K Bhatia

Hits: 5309

In retaliation to the Pakistan Air Force's pre-emptive air strikes on 03 December 1971, the IAF mounted its counter air operations against PAF bases starting from 04 December 1971. Shorkot, better known as Rafiqui, was on the IAF's hit list and the attack was led by Squadron Leader Vinod Kumar Bhatia, later Air Marshal. Here is the full account.

It was 03 December 1971. In the evening the well-lit squash court in the Air Force Officers' Mess at Ambala suddenly plunged into darkness, where I was having a workout with the marker. I swore silently at the State Electricity Supply Board for the untimely disruption in power supply. However, soon the wailing sound of sirens pierced my ears.

The sound was coming from the direction of the airfield, indicating an air-raid warning. "Up goes the balloon," I thought to myself and rushed to my room where the phone appeared to be ringing impatiently trying to elicit a response. Yes, it was a General Recall after an attempted pre-emptive strike by the PAF against a number of our airfields.

I had brought a formation of four Sukhois the same afternoon from Amritsar which was the operational base of the No.32 Squadron. Soon after reaching the Squadron in response to the General Recall we heard the President of Pakistan, General Yahya Khan's speech on Pakistan Radio declaring war against India.

As the runway at Amritsar had suffered some superficial damage, (repaired in time to induct MiG-21s late during the night) it was decided that the Sukhois would be inducted early morning on 04 December to carry out the retaliatory strikes against Pakistani airfields. No.32 Squadron was given two major Pakistan bases as their targets. The composition of the formation was:

(a) Sargodha: Thunderbird

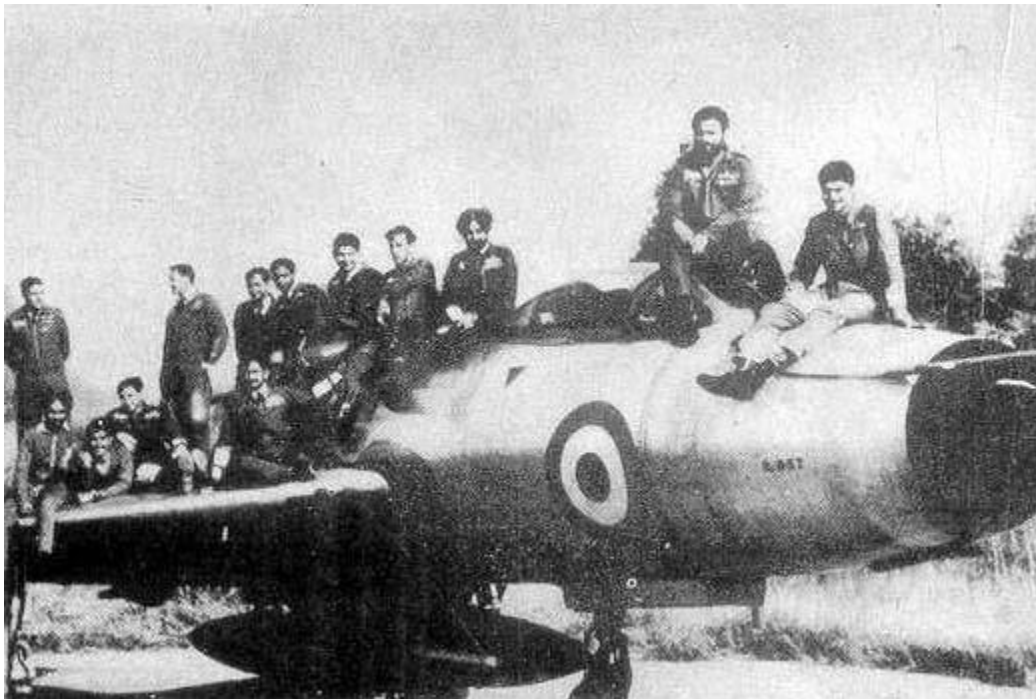
- | | | | | | |
|----|---|-----------|------|--------|----------|
| 1. | Wing | Commander | H.S. | Mangat | (CO) |
| 2. | Squadron | Leader | P. | Singh | (Pat) |
| 3. | Squadron | Leader | A.M. | Mehta | (Chhotu) |
| 4. | Flight Lieutenant S.D. Gaurishankar (Gauri) | | | | |

(b) Shorkot Road: Eagle

- | | | | | | |
|----|----------|------------|------|---------|----------|
| 1. | Squadron | Leader | V.K. | Bhatia | (Jimmy) |
| 2. | Flight | Lieutenant | A.V. | Sathaye | (Sathya) |

3. Flight Lieutenant V.V. Tambay (Uncle)
 4. Flight Lieutenant M.S. Grewal (Mally)

We got airborne at the crack of dawn, 8 aircraft in all, in waves of two, on 04 Dec 71. I was in the lead wave. The morning mist soon turned into an undercast layer. We were flying at 150 metres AGL with an unending blanket of layer clouds below us. Navigation was done on mental DR (Dead Reckoning). Luckily, close to Amritsar, there appeared a small break in the cloud layer and we could recover the aircraft by doing low level circuits at 100 metres AGL.



IAF pilots
of No.32
Squadron
. Wg Cdr
HS
Manget is
sitting
just
behind
the
cockpit.

The aircraft were refueled and armed and fitted with long range external tanks. normal drop tank capacity was of the Su-7 was 600 L. However, Shorkot Road being at extreme range, it was necessary to carry 900 L belly drop tanks. Armament in this case was carried on outer wing stations consisting of UB-16 rocket pods (16 x 57mm R/P each). While the aircraft were being prepared to, we were visited by a PAF MiG-19 aircraft which, however, sped away in the face of our ack-ack defences after firing a short, harmless cannon burst.

THE FIRST STRIKE

The aircraft were ready by 0930 hrs. If I recall correctly, the strike TOT was 1045 hrs IST. The morning low clouds had lifted by then and the visibility was reasonably good. Altogether nice weather for the mission. The Eagle formation got airborne on the dot. I carried out a gather turn at the end of which all four aircraft were in position.

We flew a loose broad frontage formation. Keeping low all the way though, stepping up our heights just a wee bit to avoid high tension pylons south of Lahore. A strict R/T silence was maintained. I knew all other members had their eyes peeled to spot bogeys (enemy aircraft) while I concentrated on navigation.

Sqn Ldr Jimmy Bhatia and Flt Lt VV 'Uncle' Tambey launch for the first strike against Shorkot Road on 4 Dec 71. Pic Courtesy: Polly Singh

The next 15 minutes were spent in rapt attention after which I could spot the IP (initial point) approaching dead ahead. A quick NATO turn for the final run-in to the target at the correct/exact location. The suspense was building up to climax when I gave the orders for the pull up. It was sheer delight to find the airfield sprawled below and ahead of us. I rolled into the attack over my No.3 & No.4 heading for the nearest ORP pen, where I spotted a Sabre parked just outside the pen.

Sathaye, my No.2 who was flying 300 metres behind me spotted two Canberras that were being refueled. Closing into the correct range, I fired the first salvo of rockets at the Sabre and the pens at the other ORP. We recovered in a perfect pre-planned formation, flew for a few kilometres clearing each other's tail and then turned around for the second attack.

This picture is from a Sqn Ldr VK Bhatia's attack on Shorkot airfield (Rafique) by No.32 Squadron, which flew Su-7s. Circle shows an exploding Sabre. While another parked Sabre can be seen in the lower right corner of the picture.

The second attack was equally successful. It appeared that we had taken the enemy completely by surprise as not a single shell of ack-ack was fired at us. We made a getaway by engaging the afterburners and accelerating to 1100kph. The skies behind us were clear of enemy aircraft, and we headed for home. After an uneventful return flight, we landed at Amritsar at about 1200 hours. The strike turned out to be the most successful one with one Canberra with a bowser and three Sabres as confirmed kills.

THE SECOND STRIKE

Our request for an immediate turn-around and repeating the strike was not agreed to by the higher controlling authorities. A suggested TOT of 1430 hours was thus turned down and we were now slotted in for simultaneous dusk strikes at Shorkot Road and Sargodha respectively. As I lost height in the dive I could see the tracer shells approaching the closer till the entire cockpit was engulfed by the exploding HE. Ignoring the ack-ack, I trained the gun-sight on the mouth of a blast pen where I could see the outline of an aircraft.

However, it was difficult to clearly spot the target in the gathering dusk. I fired a salvo of rockets and pulled out. During the runout, I noticed that my No.3 (Tambay) was without his wingman - Mally. Continuous R/T calls elicited no response from him. All the same, I turned around for the second attack. Once again, we were enveloped by the ack-ack; however all three aircraft recovered from the attack without any damage. During recovery and getaway, the formation noticed a ball of fire close to the airfield fence.

In all probability (later confirmed) Mally's aircraft was downed by the enemy ack-ack during the first attack. It appeared that our problems were not over as yet. As we slowed down due to fuel considerations after the getaway phase, two Sabres were sighted in 6 o'clock position closing in on us. I ordered jettisoning of fuel tanks with an evasive hard turn. The manoeuvre came at the right time because as the formation went into turn I saw two AAMs (Sidewinders) flashing past and hitting the ground ahead of us. We had no fuel reserve to engage the enemy fighters.

Therefore, I ordered a evasive manoeuvre which not only brought us back to the correct getaway course but also ensured a successful disengagement from the Sabres. While we were happy with another successful strike having claimed three aircraft on ground, (all probable as gun cameras were ineffective in the fading light at the time of attack) we missed gallant Mally Grewal who was shot down during the raid. (Later it

was revealed that Mally had ejected successfully and was taken prisoner of war by the PAF).

THE THIRD STRIKE

At the outbreak of hostilities we had only five sets of long range fuel drop tanks. With the jettisoning of tanks in the second strike we should have lost four sets. However, Tambay had not jettisoned his tanks during the tactical action to ward off the enemy attack which also explained why he was lagging behind after the evasive manoeuvre. This proved to be quite a coincidence as, on 5 December 1971, I was asked to carry out a third strike against the same target.

Shortage of long range drop tanks meant that the formation had to be restricted to only two aircraft. Tambay (Uncle) with his usual exuberance volunteered to fly as my No.2. The TOT given to us was around midday as the enemy defences were expected to be at a low key. By now, we knew the route by heart. The day was unusually bright for the part of the year with excellent in-flight visibility. We were flying a broad frontage formation.

At pull up point (PUP) I eased up over and into my No.2 to go for the attack. At the top of the dive, I suddenly noticed seven MiG-19S (F-6) stacked up on a tarmac far below and ahead of me. However, as I came closer, I realised that these must be dummy aircraft, which in fact they were. I diverted my attack onto a hangar firing a salvo of rockets. After the attack, I picked up Tambay who had gone in for the loop area. Tambay was lagging behind and when I gave the 180° hard turn, I found that he landed up way ahead of me.

Realising that we were close to our PUP for the second attack, I quickly changed tactics and asked Tambay to go into attack first. I saw his aircraft shining like a silver streak as he pitched up for the dive. I pulled up behind him scanning the area to pick up a juicy target. The ack-ack must have been firing feverishly at us; however, in the bright sunlight, it was difficult to spot the tracer shells. The realisation of the presence of a hundred plus anti-aircraft guns which the enemy had deployed at Shorkot Road was driven home with sickening reality, when Tambay's aircraft (B 839) suddenly began to spew out thick black smoke from the belly.

I immediately told Tambay on the R/T that he had been hit. Concentrating on his aircraft which by then had entered into a steep dive, I noticed that the smoke trail had thickened. I shouted on the R/T "Tambay eject". However, I was greeted with total

silence. I must have given eight to nine calls for him to eject without eliciting any response from Tambay. The aircraft crashed near the runway edge in a huge ball of fire and smoke.

It was a sickening and heart rending sight to see my trusted friend and my No.2 going into the ground. Blinded with fury and tears, I unleashed my rockets into the ORP area and then turned hard. I had descended so low that I could see the trees, which were in the vicinity of the airfield, coming up at me. Cursing myself, I steadied the aircraft and continued with the turn onto the getaway direction.

The last strike over Shorkot Road was over.

Squadron Leader V.K. Bhatia with a MiG-21 in his later days

Air Marshal Vinod Kumar Bhatia is a Qualified Pilot Attack Instructor (QPAI) and has spent several years on flying instructional duties both in India and abroad. He is a Graduate of the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington and the Royal College of Defence Studies in the United Kingdom. He has 4000 hours of flying to his credit on sixteen different fighter aircraft and was awarded the Vir Chakra in both the Indo-Pak Wars of 1965 and 1971. He was awarded the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal [AVSM] in 1992 and later the PVSM. He served as the AOC-in-C Central Command and Western Command before his retirement in 2002.

Two sides of the same coin : The Raid on Peshawar

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Thursday, 02 April 2015 03:04

Written by Jagan Pillarisetti

Hits: 5253

In 1999, I wrote what was my first effort at writing an article related to IAF History for the Bharat Rakshak Website - The article detailed the operations of the famous No.20 Squadron, 'The Lightnings' during the 1971 War.

It was based on a series of personal meetings and interviews with Air Vice Marshal Cecil Vivian Parker MVC VM, the highest decorated serviceman in Andhra Pradesh (even today!), and also partly on hurried notes made from "Lightning Strikes" an unpublished War Diary style document of No.20 Squadron, which AVM Parker graciously let me read through [1]. The article was well read and got good reviews - It got published in Vayu Magazine and was well appreciated all around. However It had its share of inaccuracies - the result of depending on hand written notes and interviewers memory instead of the good old tape recorder, but since it had appeared in print, the article has not been corrected on the web version.

This particular page displays the correspondence received over one episode recounted in that article. For the readers benefit, I reproduce the excerpt here.

The Raid on Peshawar : Mission 16 , 4th December 1971.

The first air raid on Peshawar airfield was undertaken by two Hunters flown by Wg Cdr CV Parker and Fg Offr CS 'Channi' Dhillon. The relevant excerpt from [When Lightning Strikes](#) is as follows:

"There being no Hunters with No.20 Sqn. at Pathankot on December 3rd, Parker was authorised to borrow two aircraft from the neighboring unit, the No.27 *Flaming Arrows* Squadron. Two aircraft were procured, with the mission launch time fixed at around 0430 hours on December 4th to enable both the pilots to reach Peshawar at first light.

Parker took Flt. Lt. C.S. Dhillon as his No.2 and when they went over to No.27 Sqn's dispersal area to pick up the Hunters, he was dismayed to find the Hunters had rocket railings fixed under its wings. Flying at extreme range, the rocket rails would have been a tremendous drag on the aircraft's performance. But time did not permit the ground crew to turn around the aircraft for their removal, and Parker was eager to start of at 0430 hours, so as not to delay the mission which might end up with them spending too much time in hostile territory in day light.

Both Hunters took off on time and after almost 75 minutes of flying, pulled up over Peshawar airfield, as dawn was breaking. Parker and Dhillon noticed three Sabres were already in the air at a distance. But due to the probability of the sun shining in the Pakistani pilots' eyes, the Hunters were not spotted. After identifying the airfield, both Parker and Dhillon went in for the first strafing run.

Dhillon noticed a Bulk Petroleum Installation (BPI) and made it a target for his second run. Parker identified two Sabres on the ground refueling from a bowser, and in his second run totaled it, with big plumes of black smoke confirming his hits. Two strafing runs were all that were allowed for this mission, and both the Hunters rendezvoused to fly back to Pathankot, when the three Sabres which were noticed earlier vectored towards the returning Hunters. The Sabres slowly caught up with the Hunters and some hits were scored on the Hunters.



Fg Offr CS 'Channi' Dhillon, Sqn Ldr Ravi Bharadwaj and Wg Cdr Cecil Parker during the operations.

Photo Courtesy: Air Vice Marshal CV Parker MVC VM. (Retd)

With still a long way to go, and the Sabres slowly making some headway in hitting the Hunters, Parker called for a break. Till then his objective had been to get himself and his wingman out safely, but with his Hunter already having bullet holes in its tanks and fuselage, the prospect of Parker rushing to help Dhillon were dim. On the order to split, Dhillon banked his aircraft hard port and headed towards Jammu. The F-86s split too, with one peeling off to chase Dhillon, while the other two stuck to Parker's tail.

"This" Parker recalls, "...was a godsend. If they had sent two Sabres to chase the less experienced Dhillon, They might have got him!"

With two Sabres on his tail, Parker arrived over the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, both separated by a negligible distance. The chase was at a low level. And just south of the two cities, Parker noticed some high ground approaching rapidly. He was faced with a dilemma, to increase power and pull up and in the process exhausting his reserves even more or to turn around, he chose a maneuver which would probably have meant death in a dogfight, he turned his aircraft around, dropping half flaps, and losing speed.

The Hunter cleared the obstacle in a tight turn. The Sabre that was chasing him was flying too fast to follow a tight turn and the Pakistani pilot pulled back into a high-speed turn. Parker on coming out of the turn noticed that the Pakistani pilot had in fact overshot him, and having lost sight of his adversary, was searching frantically in the skies by jinking his aircraft around. Parker could not let go of this opportunity and he closed in & fired his little remaining ammunition into the Sabre which plunged into the ground and blew up.

The second Sabre was nowhere to be seen and Parker never knew what happened to the second Pakistani pilot, who probably was lost in the chase. Now devoid of any adversaries on his tail, he set course for Pathankot. Parker received some sporadic ground fire just near the border, which could have come from either side. He had radioed to Pathankot about his precarious fuel situation and Pathankot ATC cleared him to land "at any runway, any place."

Meanwhile Dhillon was coming in from the direction of Jammu, to Pathankot. He had received several hits from the Sabre but all the same shook him off and lost him. Dhillon too made a similar call to Pathankot, and was approaching it with his fuel reserves at the minimum.

Parker being nearer to the airfield landed first, his engine flamed out due to lack of fuel. Dhillon too landed with empty tanks. Both the aircraft had numerous bullet holes. Parker's aircraft received 22 hits from the tail controls right up to the cockpit area. Two Sabres on the ground were confirmed destroyed, as was one Sabre in air combat. [2] Not bad for a first strike of the war!"

The Pakistani Version:

Apparently there were people who disagreed for us. So I was one day knocked out of my chair when I received an email from a Pakistani Pilot who wanted to share his side of the story . The email came from Capt Tariq Syed, A pilot from the Pakistan International Airlines [PIA]. Tariq Syed was a Flt Lt during the 1971 war and happened to be flying one of the Sabres over Peshawar that the incoming Indian pilots had noticed. Interesting details emerged from his email.

"Dear Jagan Mohan,

I read the IAF account of its Hunter strike at Peshawar on 4th Dec (0715AM) with great interest, as I was No 2 of a six-ship strike formation of F-86's taking off at the time of this IAF raid. Your facts, however, are not accurate. In the interest of preserving the facts for the sake of history, I offer my account of this episode, as follows.

On the reported morning of the 4th, Dec, I was detailed as No.2 to a strike mission of 4 F-86's along with two CAP aircraft (total six Sabres). The Squadron commander, Wg.Cdr Changhezi was the leader. All six aircraft lined up for take-off. Lead and myself rolled and shortly after breaking ground, even before gear retraction, we heard a call from "Killer-control" that two Hunters had pulled up from the N.W (Jamrud) side and were attacking the airfield. We veered off to the left of the runway and jettisoned our stores.

The rest of the formation, which were sitting ducks at that time, continued their take-off and all got airborne safely, jettisoning their stores off the sides of the runway(R/W 35 was in use). It is truly amazing that the Hunters failed to notice our aircraft getting airborne right under their noses, and instead, attacked some dummy F-86's parked on the open tarmac across the runway. They did succeed in hitting the dummies.

In the mean time, I had maintained low level and skirted wide around Peshawar city in a right hand turn. All my stores had jettisoned, except my right drop-tank. While heading in a southerly direction, accelerating to combat speed, I was amazed to see two Hunters exiting across my path towards Cherat. They were very fast and judging from their exhaust smoke, they must have been maintaining full power at that point. I turned left in their direction, following their smoke trail, having lost contact with the aircraft. I, however, knew that they would have to pull-up to cross the Cherat hills shortly.

That's exactly what happened and I regained contact. By this time, I had closed the gap and when they crossed the hills, they came back on power and I began to close in fast. I also vectored the rest of the formation towards the two Hunters.

The Hunters were flying a strange battle formation, only about 1500-2000 feet apart at a very low altitude of about 50-100 feet AGL. Their look-out was very poor, especially the Hunter on the right, presumably Parker. Due to my asymmetrical load, my rate of closure was not as fast as some formation members that finally caught up with the exiting duo. I was about 3000 feet astern of Parker when Sqn.Ldr Salim Gohar(No.3) raced in behind Dhillon (on the left) and opened fire. It was an amazing sight. While I was closing in on Parker, I was treated to a live airshow, going on to my left! Initially, Saleems bullets landed short and below Dhillon and a shower of exploding rounds traced his flight path against the earth. Saleem was closing too fast and was forced to break off his attack in a sharp turn to the left. Even then, Saleems aircraft almost overshot Dhillon dangerously close. And all this while, Parker was asleep! He simply failed to notice all this activity and give his wingman proper tail clearance warning. I think this was criminal on his part, for which Dhillon should feel rightly grieved. However, even Dhillon was only slightly better in his look-out as he spotted me at a mere distance of less than 600 feet right behind Parker, before he gave a break to the right.

Unfortunately, while I was nearing gun range, I noticed that my gunsight had disappeared. However, I knew that with the very high rate of fire and sheer volume of "Buck-shot" delivered by the six .50 Brownings, I could easily walk my tracers through the target, which was doing nothing but straight-and-level at the time. I got so close that I could have reached out and smacked his tail with my hand! But Parkers luck was with him that fateful day. When I pressed the trigger, my guns did not fire! I only got time to zip a shocked glance inside the cockpit and noticed the gun fire circuit-breaker had also popped out! Talk of bad luck (for me) and darn good luck (for Parker)! I was literally so close that I could not have missed, and would probably have received debris damage from Parkers aircraft, had my guns fired. I may have also earned the distinction of being the first pilot to record a kill from my squadron. But fate works in strange ways. The prayers of Parkers family must have been answered that day!

Dhillon (presumably, if he was on the left) called a break to the right. I had to take severe action to the left to keep the Hunters at as high angle-off and G as possible as my rate of closure was very high. Still, I managed to overshoot the two in a very high rate climbing turn to the left. Dhillon reversed, seeing that I had overshoot, though I was never in danger as my rate and G was too high for them to follow. Even so, I think Dhillon took a wild shot, because we were so close that I could hear his 30MM cannon firing!

The Hunters were already low on fuel, so they preferred to get back to hugging the deck in an(understandable) effort to get home. Changhezi and another formation member took up the chase and fired at the Hunters as they crossed Mangla lake. The gun-camera showed rounds impacting the lake water. Some rounds appear to have punctured the wing tank of a Hunter as it trailed white (fuel). However, neither Hunter came down in Pakistani

territory, nor did any Hunter shoot down any of our aircraft on that day. The IAF Hunters were very, very lucky during this first raid to Peshawar. The second raid did not fare well, as Saleem Baig shot down one over the outskirts of the city, to the south.

This is the true story, as we flew these sorties. It is, therefore hoped that fiction be set aside and the truth be recorded. Also, if these two pilots are still alive, they may be rebuked from my side for exceptionally poor look-out on their side. They were so lucky, they will never realize how amazingly close they got to being shot down. Pure luck,

that's all!

With best wishes,

Then	Flt.Lt	Tariq	Nazir	Syed.
Member of 26 Sqn. Peshawar during the 71 War.				

Indian Readers might be put off at the harsh tone employed by Flt Lt Tariq Syed. But it needs to be remembered that he was writing the mail to the author and not with the intention that the letter will one day be put up on the Internet, or that it will be read by the person that he wanted to rebuke. When I asked if I can forward the email to AVM Parker so that he can clarify some of the issues, Tariq Syed sportingly accepted it, saying:

"Please feel free to show my E-Mail to AVM Parker and my apologies for sounding harsh, but to a fighter pilot, some basics are hard to overlook, especially in times of war, when your wingman depends for his life on your vigilance. One possible reason for your pilots flying unusually close in battle formation could have been the typically poor winter visibility at low level in the early morning hours, with smoke and mist haze, combined with the relatively poor rear visibility of the Hunter aircraft."

AVM Parker replies:

I spoke with AVM Parker and he expressed his interest in reading Capt Tariq Syed's emails. After I handed over the copies, AVM Parker assured me that he will send me a response to the emails I had sent him and also gave permission for the letter to be put up on our website. The three page letter arrived in due course of time.

"Dear Jagan,

Thank you for your letter dated 5th November 200x. After our return from Delhi, we had been very busy with various commitments hence this delay in responding.

I have read through the em by Tariq Syed. He is ofcourse entitled to his opinions but the facts (along with his deductions there - from) as seen from his cockpit, differ from the facts as observed from Dhillon and my cockpits. Though a shade over 30 years have elapsed, the events of our strike on Peshawar on 4th Dec 71 are quite clear.

Contrary to Tariq's observation, both Dhillon and myself had two Sabres in sight behind us and above during our recovery to base. I suspected that there were more than two: both Dhillon and I were in communication throughout, being low on fuel, I waited till they posed an immediate threat before calling a break. My intention was to get Dhillon safely across the rapidly approaching border to the north as I knew our pursuers would not enter Indian Air Space, while simultaneously drawing them on to me. On my reversing after the break (during which I intentionally dropped IAS) the Sabre behind me could not hold the turn and overshot me right to left in a climbing turn. The last 12 rounds were fired at him and we have the gun camera shot of an F-86 jinking as he obviously lost sight of our aircraft. Meanwhile Dhillon assured me he had crossed the border.

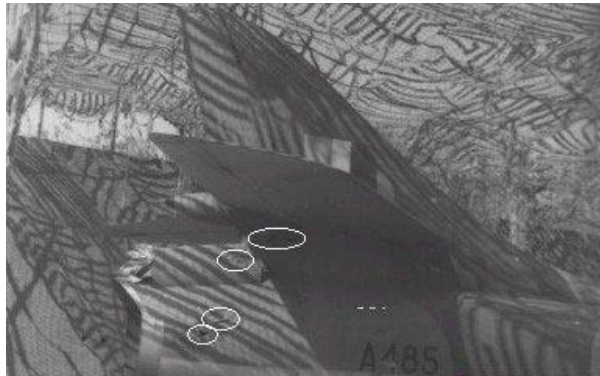
Subsequently it was revealed that one my guns had jammed fully. I do not know who the pilot of the Sabre was but it seems to have been Tariq, was this luck? With his constant reference to 'Prayers' and 'Luck', I take it that Tariq is a devout man but not averse to a belief in 'chance'. As an experienced flier he should know that it takes a great deal more than prayers and luck to attain your aim. The Bottom line is that between two to six Sabres (with all the advantage on their side) were unable to prevent two Hunters from achieving their aim of a safe recovery to base. What terribly bad 'luck' all of them had.

I share Tariq's concern for wingmen. He may like to know that in 35 years of fighter flying, I have not lost a wingman in peace or in war. Probably my good 'luck'. Do assure him that both pilots are very much alive. Dhillon runs a successful trucking business and Parker is lucky enough to have just entered his seventieth year in excellent health... and prays it will stay that way, Inshaalah.

Since Tariq accused lady luck of favoring me and frowning upon him, it might be of interest to recall that purely by chance, I met an Air Marshal O Brian in a south London pub some years ago. He was apparently the DCAS of the PAF during the 1971 war. Naturally we discussed the air operations of 1965 and 1971 and the role of luck in the air. This is what he said:- "people believe in luck because they do not know how to explain the success of others". Ofcourse this is only his opinion, but strangely relevant to this topic.

There was one major handicap the first mission to Peshawar had. My squadron not being at base, I was instructed at very short notice (at night) to take two aircraft from our sister squadron and execute the mission. All their aircraft were configured for their close support role. When the aircraft were handed over to Dhillon and self, I was aghast to find that there was no time to remove them. So I had to accept that my loss in fuel would

leave me no fuel for combat at all. We were thus low on fuel from take off. And this factor determined all my decisions luck notwithstanding.



THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY: Hunter A-485, of the No.27 Sqn, after the raid on Peshawar. Wg. Cdr. C.V. Parker, CO - No.20 Sqn, was flying this particular aircraft.

The ground crew counted 22 bullet hits from the Sabre's guns. Also seen in the picture is damage to the tail drag chute compartment. Parker landed without the chute.

In Feb I travel to old school to attend its platinum jubilee, it seem I am now the sole survivor of the founding year in 42. Bu a strange coincidence, in my earlier school in Calcutta in 1941, a co-pupil of mine was Mehmood Alam later an Air Cmde in the PAF and a co member of mine at the RCDS in London in 1980.

With all good wishes for Christmas and the coming year. Hopefully a better one than what the world has seen in 2001

Regards

Cecil Vivian Parker "

More Observations:

AVM Parker had been quite modest in explaining about the fuel situation of the Hunters. When he writes *"I had to accept that my loss in fuel would leave me no fuel for combat at all"*, he was right on the mark.

The Hunters barely had enough fuel to do more than two passes on Peshawar airfield, it certainly was not the time to hang around on the enemy airfield and mix it with the defending fighters. Contrary to what Flt Lt Syed says about the Hunters missing the Sabres on take off, the No.20 Squadron war diary clearly mentions that the pilot noticed three Sabres already in the air when they arrived over the city.

What Flt Lt Tariq Syed does not know , and what AVM Parker does not mention in his letter is how AVM Parker's Hunter flamed out on the runway soon after touching down at the Pathankot airfield, even before it turned around at the end of the Runway. Or how Channi Dhillon's Hunter actually flamed out 5NM from the threshold. Dhillon refused to eject, and glided the Hunter down in a successful dead stick landing [3].

Would Tariq Syed change his opinion if he had known these facts? I wouldn't know because I never did receive an acknowledgement from Tariq Syed after I forwarded a copy of AVM Parker's letter. I would assume that he now understood the Indian Pilot's precarious fuel position. But there is no way to tell for sure.

What we do now know is that this is the first time we have all the details on of an event from both sides of the fence. And hopefully this will be an interesting resource for future aircombat historians.

Notes:

. I must clarify here that the original title of the web article '[When Lightning Strikes](#)' was independently arrived at even before I knew the existence of the War Diary with the similar sounding name . As it turned out the claim of the Sabre in aircombat was incorrect. The Sabre was claimed as 'Probable' even in No.20 Squadron's records and was not a confirmed kill. The Author accepts all the blame for the misinterpretation . A recommendation of an immediate Vir Chakra went out for Dhillon that night, but he was awarded a Vayusena Medal after the war.

When Lightning Strikes!

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

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Written by Jagan Pillarisetti

Hits: 10273

Throughout the decade in the 1980s, a generation of Indians grew up looking at 9 Hunters of the Indian Air Force (IAF) flying in a diamond formation, executing loops, rolls, dives and different aerobatics in a show of skill, performance & precision. The formation, better known as the 'Thunderbolts' thrilled crowds at many air shows, flying the length & breadth of the country performing their routine over & over again,

without hitch. This unit was meant to carry the message of the Indian Air Force to the general public.

Though people knew the formation as a showpiece of the IAF and the name 'Thunderbolts', they never quite knew that it was one of the most highly decorated squadrons of the Indian Air Force. No.20 Sqn., which had the unique distinction of flying the same type of aircraft, the Hunter for a period of 38 years! Flying in two air wars, No.20 *Lightnings* earned an impressive tally of two Maha Vir Chakra and eight Vir Chakra Awards. Something which many a squadron would covet.

The Lightnings were raised on 01 June 1956, at Halwara under the command of Sqn. Ldr. K.M. Ram, and were initially equipped with the Vampire Mk.52, a type that was relegated to the second line in the Indian Air Force, as new Canberras, Hunters and Gnats were being inducted in the IAF. No.20 Sqn was equipped with the Hunter Mk.56 in 1959 at Ambala. It was to fly the aircraft till 1997!

The squadron moved to Palam in 1960, to provide air defence cover to the capital. The squadron's crest embodies, three bars of lightning in conjunction with the Himalayan Eagle. It's Sanskrit motto translated means, *Fast and Fearless*.

This squadron first saw action in 1965, when it sent a detachment of Hunters to Halwara, and operating along with the other two Hunter squadrons, they earned laurels in many an interdiction mission. Three pilots, Sqn. Ldr. B.K. Bishnoi, Flt. Lt. C.K.K. Menon and Flt. Lt. D.S. Negi received Vir Chakras for a particular mission in which they interdicted an ammunition train with cannon & rockets and destroyed it. The squadron suffered some losses like Flt. Lt. K.C. Cariappa who baled out to become a prisoner, and Fg. Off. F.D. Bunsha, who was killed on attachment to No.7 *Battle Axes* Squadron. The squadron ended the conflict with a tally of three Vir Chakras and a Vayu Sena Medal.

Immediately after the 1965 War, No.20 Sqn. moved to Hindon, its new airbase outside Delhi under the command of Wg. Cdr. N.C. Suri (later Chief of Air Staff). In March 1969, Wg. Cdr. C.V. Parker came over from Jamnagar where he had raised and commanded the IAF's first Hunter Operational Training Unit (OTU), to take command of the Lightnings.

Wg. Cdr. C.V. Parker was no stranger to the Lightnings. He had earlier served with the squadron as a Flight Commander during 1962-65. Parker had missed the earlier war in 1965, as he was on deputation to a training program in the United States. During that time, on hearing the commencement of hostilities, he tried in vain to cut

short his stay in the US and return back to his unit. When he had taken command of the Squadron, Parker was all set to make up for his absence from the earlier war.

The squadron re-equipped with the F Mk.56A aircraft and moved to Pathankot airbase in July 1971, where they started training for their designated roles. No.20 Sqn's role, as it was primarily conceived, was of air defence. Later, all Hunter squadrons had been marked out for support & offensive operations. When war did break out in December 1971, No.20 Sqn focused on counter air and interdiction, with close air support coming later.

Training was conducted in earnest, with the role of No.20 being delegated to counter air sorties and economic targets. The latter was a novelty, as far as the Indian AF's strategy was concerned. In the previous conflict, economic targets were never attacked. This time, a number of key industrial targets have been identified whose destruction would be detrimental to the Pakistani war machinery.

Wg. Cdr. Parker had an establishment of 15 single-seater Hunter and 2 trainers. He had 18 pilots (including himself, four trainee pilots), 6 ground duty officers and 335 airmen under his command. The main focus of the Squadron during this period was on training throughout the period leading up to the war. It was a wise decision as No.20 Sqn. had one of the lowest attrition rates, amongst the squadrons, in spite of the effort it had put up in the air war.

In October 1971, Parker has a surprise visitor to his squadron. One fine day, an impromptu inspection was called in and the visitor turned out to be Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal, in one of his surprise visits to forward units. All the pilots turned out in flying gear for inspection. As Parker came in to receive the CAS, Lal remarked, "Parker, I understand that you lay lot of emphasis on physical training, maybe that's why one of your pilots is still in his PT Shoes!"

Wg. Cdr. Parker could detect a hint of well intended sarcasm in the Lal's remark. Parker looked at the pilots for the offender, and realised what had inspired Lal to remark on that. Parker replied to Lal, "Sir, the pilot is not wearing PT shoes, he is a naval pilot, wearing his white uniform shoes." Even Lal was unaware of the details of how a naval officer came to be deputed to an operational IAF squadron.

In the late 1960s it was decided that the Navy and the Air Force would depute two pilots each to operational units to learn about the workings of each other. Accordingly

Lt. Arun Prakash and Lt. Peter Debrass, from the IN, were deputed to the IAF. Debrass went and joined No.9 Sqn on Gnat aircraft, and Arun Prakash came to the Lightnings. The CAS had been unaware of the details and he did not know of that the pilot was attached to the Lightnings.

On being appraised of the situation, Lal asked "What if on the outbreak of a war, the navy wants him back?". Parker replied, "He would be of more use to the Air Force than to the Navy. Moreover the amount of expenditure incurred in his training with Hunters would be wasted if he goes back to his naval unit, where in all probability he will not be as useful." Lal agreed with the assessment, and Arun Prakash flew with the Lightnings in the conflict that came later.

We will not go into much details on the background of the scenario leading to war, suffice it to say that the preemptive strike by the PAF on the evening of December 3rd, set the ball rolling. War descended on the subcontinent again and all the fighting units plunged into the battle.

Pathankot was attacked in the twilight hours of December 3rd. At around 1743 hrs, A Mirage III of the PAF came over to drop bombs and strafe the airfield. Pathankot is a mere 60 seconds flying time from the border and offered the least amount of early warning to the Indians.

In 1965, the PAF managed to do considerable damage to the airfield in a surprise attack. But this time around, the IAF had carefully planned out its strategy. None of the No.20 Sqn's aircraft was based at Pathankot. All the aircraft were dispersed to rear airfields like Ambala, Palam, Hindon, etc. After the attack was over and the full scale hostilities began, the IAF has started retaliating.

Wg. Cdr. Parker was in a meeting with Air Commodore T.S. Brar, at the time of the PAF preemptive attack. On confirmation of the hostilities, all the detachments were notified to return to Pathankot. This was duly carried out in the early hours of December 4th. As the Commanding Officer, Parker exercised his privilege of mounting the first mission which was to attack Peshawar airfield.

The attack on Peshawar on December 4th was a classic in air war of 1971. Erstwhile, only Canberras had dared to fly all the way to Peshawar and bomb it. During the 1965 War, Canberras of No.5 Sqn managed a solitary raid on the night of September

13/14th to Peshawar. Canberras were chosen, as no other aircraft had the range to fly the distance.

How the Hunters of No.20 Sqn attempted such a seemingly impossible task deserves to be examined in closer detail. The Hunter Mk.56, which was acquired by the IAF was equipped to fly with four 100 imp gallon tanks to extend its range. Even with all the tanks and no external weapons load, the aircraft never had the range to fly to Peshawar and back.

Between the wars, the Hunter Mk.56A was acquired which could carry two 100 gallon outboard and two 230 gallon tanks on its inner pylons, thus extending its range. Trials were made before the war, testing the aircraft's range. On one occasion, two Hunters were flown lo-hi-lo all the way from Pathankot to Jamnagar, over flying Agra and Ahmedabad, to fire on the Jamnagar firing range and land at Jamnagar.

The pilots had sufficient confidence in the Hunter's ability to reach Peshawar and back. Even then, the aircraft would have to carry only cannons, dispensing with any external stores like bombs or rockets. The allowance for air combat and evasive maneuvers were marginal if not non-existent.

There being no Hunters with No.20 Sqn. at Pathankot on December 3rd, Parker was authorised to borrow two aircraft from the neighboring unit, the No.27 *Flaming Arrows* Squadron. Two aircraft were procured, with the mission launch time fixed at around 0430 hours on December 4th to enable both the pilots to reach Peshawar at first light.

Parker took Flt. Lt. C.S. Dhillon as his No.2 and when they went over to No.27 Sqn's dispersal area to pick up the Hunters, he was dismayed to find the Hunters had rocket railings fixed under its wings. Flying at extreme range, the rocket rails would have been a tremendous drag on the aircraft's performance. But time did not permit the ground crew to turn around the aircraft for their removal, and Parker was eager to start off at 0430 hours, so as not to delay the mission which might end up with them spending too much time in hostile territory in day light.

Both Hunters took off on time and after almost 75 minutes of flying, pulled up over Peshawar airfield, as dawn was breaking. Parker and Dhillon noticed three Sabres were already in the air at a distance. But due to the probability of the sun shining in the Pakistani pilots' eyes, the Hunters were not spotted. After identifying the airfield, both Parker and Dhillon went in for the first strafing run.

Dhillon noticed a Bulk Petroleum Installation (BPI) and made it a target for his second run. Parker identified two Sabres on the ground refueling from a bowser, and in his second run totaled it, with big plumes of black smoke confirming his hits. Two strafing runs were all that were allowed for this mission, and both the Hunters rendezvoused to fly back to Pathankot, when the three Sabres which were noticed earlier vectored towards the returning Hunters. The Sabres slowly caught up with the Hunters and some hits were scored on the Hunters.

With still a long way to go, and the Sabres slowly making some headway in hitting the Hunters, Parker called for a break. Till then his objective had been to get himself and his wingman out safely, but with his Hunter already having bullet holes in its tanks and fuselage, the prospect of Parker rushing to help Dhillon were dim. On the order to split, Dhillon banked his aircraft hard port and headed towards Jammu. The F-86s split too, with one peeling off to chase Dhillon, while the other two stuck to Parker's tail.

"This" Parker recalls, "...was a godsend. If they had sent two Sabres to chase the less experienced Dhillon, They might have got him!"

With two Sabres on his tail, Parker arrived over the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, both separated by a negligible distance. The chase was at a low level. And just south of the two cities, Parker noticed some high ground approaching rapidly. He was faced with a dilemma, to increase power and pull up and in the process exhausting his reserves even more or to turn around, he chose a maneuver which would probably have meant death in a dogfight, he turned his aircraft around, dropping half flaps, and losing speed.

The Hunter cleared the obstacle in a tight turn. The Sabre that was chasing him was flying too fast to follow a tight turn and the Pakistani pilot pulled back into a high-speed turn. Parker on coming out of the turn noticed that the Pakistani pilot had in fact overshot him, and having lost sight of his adversary, was searching frantically in the skies by jinking his aircraft around. Parker could not let go of this opportunity and he closed in & fired his little remaining ammunition into the Sabre which plunged into the ground and blew up.

The second Sabre was nowhere to be seen and Parker never knew what happened to the second Pakistani pilot, who probably was lost in the chase. Now devoid of any adversaries on his tail, he set course for Pathankot. Parker received some sporadic ground fire just near the border, which could have come from either side. He had

radioed to Pathankot about his precarious fuel situation and Pathankot ATC cleared him to land "at any runway, any place."

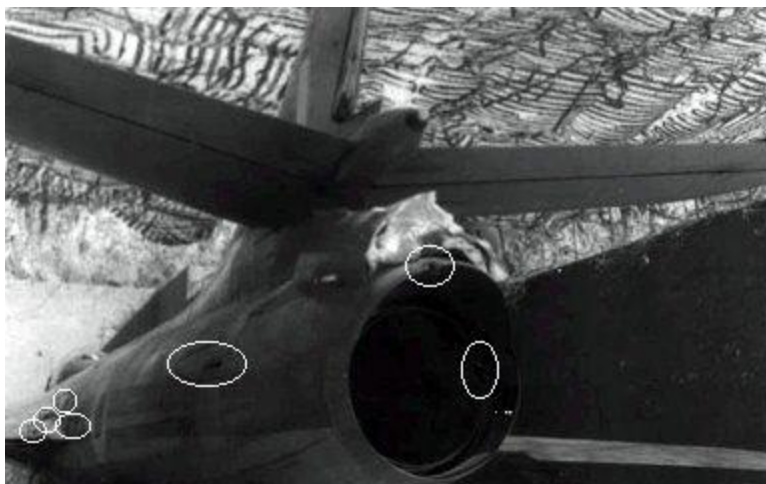
Meanwhile Dhillon was coming in from the direction of Jammu, to Pathankot. He had received several hits from the Sabre but all the same shook him off and lost him. Dhillon too made a similar call to Pathankot, and was approaching it with his fuel reserves at the minimum.

Parker being nearer to the airfield landed first, his engine flamed out due to lack of fuel. Dhillon too landed with empty tanks. Both the aircraft had numerous bullet holes. Parker's aircraft received 22 hits from the tail controls right up to the cockpit area. Two Sabres on the ground were confirmed destroyed, as was one Sabre in air combat. Not bad for a first strike of the war!



THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY: Hunter A-485, of the No.27 Sqn, after the raid on Peshawar. Wg. Cdr. C.V. Parker, CO - No.20 Sqn, was flying this particular aircraft. The ground crew counted 22 bullet hits from the Sabre's guns. Also seen in the picture is damage to the tail drag chute compartment.

Parker landed without the chute. Also see picture [three](#) and [four](#).



Both the damaged aircraft were returned to their original owners, No.27 Sqn., with gratitude as well as apologies. Meanwhile the aircraft of No.20 Sqn, had returned to

Pathankot. One aircraft was fired at eagerly by the Indian air defence gunners. Luckily no damage was done.

The second strike of the Lightnings was already underway by the time, the first strike had landed. Sqn. Ldr. Jal Mistry, the senior most pilot of the squadron after the CO, along with Sqn. Ldr. Bajpai, flew to attack Kohat, which was also at the extreme range of the aircraft. Bajpai's Hunter started too late, so Jal Mistry flew alone to attack Kohat airfield. The target was identified and attacked, the aircraft being recovered successfully.

Lt. Arun Prakash, IN, led the third mission with Karumbaya as his wingman to attack Chaklala Airfield. The aircraft arrived over Chaklala to find a number of unidentified aircraft, from light executive aircraft to C-130s. Arun Prakash identified and destroyed a C-130, with his colleague attacking and hitting several hangers and installations.

Sqn. Ldr. A.A.D. Rozario, another senior flight commander, led the attack to Murid airfield with Fg. Off. Balasubramanian as his No.2 and Kailey and Flt. Lt. Deoskar as his No.3 and No.4. Arriving over Murid airfield, the aircraft received the now familiar response of ack-ack fire.

The first pair of pilots, Rozario and Balasubramanian immediately identified several targets and attacked them. One 'needle-nosed aircraft', in all probability a F-104 or a Mirage III, which was camouflaged was identified and destroyed. Later a sortie by a PR Sukhoi-7 confirmed the destruction of this aircraft. The second pair of Kailey and Deoskar missed the target. So they carried out some interdiction before returning safely back to base.

Back at Pathankot, the SASO, HQ WAC telephonically ordered a second strike on Peshawar airfield. Parker advised against it, as the gains may not be commensurate with the effort. The SASO overruled the CO, and a second raid on Peshawar was launched. Two Hunters flown by Sqn. Ldr. K.N. Bajpai and Fg. Off. K.P. Muralidharan took off for

Their standing orders were clear, at such an extreme range, all air combat was to be ignored, and as feared both the pilots ran into air opposition, intercepted by Sabres as soon as they had completed their attack. Bajpai called for a break and a rendezvous to fly back to Pathankot, but Murali instead of evading the attacking Sabres got involved in a dogfight.

Muralidharan was last seen flying north of Peshawar in combat with a Sabre. Bajpai had enough problems of his own with the Sabres taking shots at him. However Bajpai managed to shake off his pursuers, but found himself in a damaged aircraft, with diminishing fuel reserves. He knew he would never reach Pathankot.

Base suggested that Bajpai land at Jammu, where a new airfield was being constructed. Jammu, received the attention of the GREF just before the beginning of the war, and a engineer force along with civilian labour was engaged in re-building the runway. Jammu was notified by Pathankot about Bajpai's imminent arrival and all the construction equipment was cleared off the runway to enable the Hunter pilot to land safely.

All the labourers cleared the debris and equipment as the smoking Hunter came into land. Bajpai put the Hunter down neatly, but the runway proved to be too short for him, the Hunter overshot at the Tawi end, and placed itself snugly on a civilian truck which was unloading masonry, at the end of the runway. He climbed down safely, none the worse for his landing experience. The GREF personnel marveled at the unique sight of the Hunter sitting on the truck. Later a driver came, and drove the truck with the Hunter on it, to the repair shop!

Thus ended the first day strikes of Lightning squadron. Five missions were flown to four different airfields and at least four aircraft on the ground and a F-86 in the air were assessed to have been destroyed. The other Hunter squadron at Pathankot, No.27, too flew some missions to Pakistani airfields. However they lost two of their Hunters to PAF's F-6s on two different occasions. Both the pilots missing in action.

As dawn broke out on December 5th, the first raid of the day was already on the way. Sqn. Ldr. Ravi Bharadwaj and Flt. Lt. Gahlaut, flew to attack Chaklala airfield. The pilots continued the good work done by Lt. Arun Prakash and his wingmen the day earlier, and successfully knocked out some aircraft on the ground. Bharadwaj, adding a C-130 transport to the tally, and Gahlaut, destroying a Twin Otter.

The Twin Otter was admitted to have been destroyed by Radio Pakistan, but the admission could have been forced by the fact the Otter belonged to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) detachment with the UNMOGIP. Though the aircraft were observed as having been painted as white, it was difficult for the pilots to actually confirm that the aircraft belonged to the UN.

Parker was to lead the second raid of the day to Mianwali at around 1431 hours, with Dhillon as his No.2 and Balasubramanian and Arun Prakash as the No.3 and 4. Parker's aircraft failed to start and Dhillon's aircraft went unserviceable after getting airborne. Nevertheless the strike was underway with Bala as the leader. One C-130 was identified and Arun Prakash knocked the aircraft out, destroying it completely. Some other light aircraft too were destroyed.

The attack on Mianwali was timed to coincide with another mission to Sakesar radar station. Sakesar was the air defence center of the PAF which was instrumental in directing the air defence fighters of the PAF. Sqn. Ldrs. Jal Mistry and Karumbaya were designated to take off for the mission, which was at the same time as the other raid on Mianwali. Karumbaya's Hunter failed to start. Jal Mistry again decided to fly alone to Sakesar. The Indian Air Force strongly discourages pilots to fly on solitary missions alone. But Mistry decided to go alone, Parker himself was not available, being in the air himself.

Mistry flew alone to Sakesar and successfully rocketed it. Bala and Arun Prakash, who were returning from Mianwali, got a radio call from Mistry announcing the damage to Sakesar. It was the last they ever heard from him. Mistry was intercepted by a Mirage III flown by Flt. Lt. Safdar. The PAF pilot scored a hit with an air-to-air missile and reported the Hunter going down. Mistry was killed in the crash. Sakesar was to become a death trap for Hunters that day.

Much earlier in the day, another mission of two Hunters from No.27 squadron struck at Sakesar. These two Hunters were intercepted in the return leg by two MiG-19s from Mianwali and shot down. Both the pilots being killed. Mistry was the third pilot to be shot down attacking the same target.

Back at Pathankot, Mistry was declared missing. Later, a Pakistani broadcast was picked up specifying that Mistry was shot down over Pakistan. It appeared that either Mistry was a POW or that the Pakistanis have recovered something to identify him, most probably his Identity Card, which incidentally pilots were not supposed to carry with them. However much later on, the pilots at the Lightning Squadron came to know that Mistry was killed in the combat.

Four Hunters flown by Fg. Offs. DeMonte, Suraj Kumar, "Bond" Heble and Kailey flew a sortie to Lahore and Walton in search of opportunity targets. They found and attacked some railway installations and a train somewhere near Walton. They came

back without damage. The last mission of the day was a two ship strike against Chak Jumra by Deoskar and A.K. "Bomber" Sharma. By end of the second day of operations, No.20 Sqn. had flown nine missions and destroyed more than six Pakistani aircraft on the ground with a loss of two Hunters and pilots lost.

From December 6th onwards, No.20 turned its attention from counter air to economic targets. Those were targets whose destruction would prove to be damaging to the Pakistani industry. Top of the list was the Attock Oil Refinery, which was situated South East of Rawalpindi.

This target was defended by a good network of anti-aircraft guns controlled by the nearby airfield of Chaklala which was about 20 miles away. Destruction of the refinery or at the very least, hampering its operations would impose a severe crunch in the POL reserves of the Pakistanis.

It was planned to send a four ship strike to Attock. Wg. Cdr. Parker, along with Sqn. Ldr. Bajpai, Fg. Offs. DeMonte and Karumbaya were the pilots on this mission. Technical snags prevented Karumbaya's Hunter from starting. Finally Parker, DeMonte and Bajpai took off to attack the refinery.

The actual routing of the Hunters took them over for a diversionary attack on to Chaklala, then executing a turnabout and hitting the Attock Oil Refinery from the west. The AA Guns were caught napping at first. The refinery was shrouded in camouflage, and the AA Guns were defending it to the inch. Parker was the first to dive in. The Hunters carried cannon ammunition, and the first burst set fire to the fuel tanks.

The fire spread quickly through the refinery fuelled by the vapours. The blaze spread so fast that their height was reaching the Hunters which were making their second run. The ack-ack fire could not make its presence felt, and all the aircraft were recovered safely. Gun camera pictures of the raid, prove the accuracy of the damage to the facilities. PR recce confirmed the damage to the refinery. The fire in the refinery resulted in a *beautiful blaze* lasting several days and nights. Indian bombers flying in the stealth of the night reported the flames which served as a navigational aid for some days to come.



Gun Camera pictures of the attack on the Attock Oil Refinery, on 6th December 1971. The picture was taken by the No.2 Hunter - Sqn. Ldr. Bajpai - in the formation.



**An Artist's impression of a Hunter of No.20 Squadron after attacking the Attock Oil refinery.
Painting Copyright : Polly**

The first effort to attack a economic target was a success for the squadron. Focus soon shifted towards Interdiction. A strike was launched against railway targets on the Wazirawali-Lahore railway axis and the raid was uneventful in terms of opposition encountered.

The next economic target on the list of No.20 Squadron was the Mangla Hydel Dam which was attacked in the morning of December 7th. The strike was scheduled to be a four aircraft mission. Sqn. Ldr. R.N. Bharadwaj led the raid, with C.S. Dhillon, Chowfin and Heble as his wingmen. All the Hunters were equipped with 2 x 68mm rocket pods.

Mangla Dam has been assigned as a target for the squadron as far back as October 1971. Parker was briefed about the position and location of the dam, and the objective was given as the destruction of the Hydro Electric Station at the foot of the dam. With no pictures to go by, and instructions to knock out the Hydel Station, a trip for Parker was arranged to the Joginder Nagar Dam in Punjab.

This dam was supposed to simulate the actual layout of Mangla dam, and Parker was allowed to study the area in detail. Later, Parker and Bharadwaj, flew a dummy sortie to the Joginder Nagar Dam, to try and test their tactics. All the training paid off, when Bharadwaj led the actual raid on the Mangla Dam, he found the target exactly as they imagined it, with the Hydel station at the foot of the dam, with two AA guns on top of it.

Again the enemy AA defences were caught napping. They could not respond effectively to stop the Hunters which by the time had set fire and damaged the Hydel Station. The Hunters suffered several cannon stoppages and failure of the rocket pods to fire, but all in all, the power station was badly knocked about.

A second strike was planned later in the day. Bharadwaj deputed to lead the aircraft again, accompanied by Dhillon, Sharma and Chowfin. But Bharadwaj's aircraft suffered problems, the engine refusing to start and the remaining three carried out the raid, without damage or loss. Sqn. Ldr. Rozario led a 4-aircraft mission to Kohat, with DeMonte and Karumbaya as his wingmen. The fourth aircraft flown by Deoskar, returned to base as soon as it suffered some technical snags after take off. The raid was successful.

Meanwhile Parker led a mission to Murid airfield. Murid was a forward station for a MiG-19 squadron and some Sabres. Arun Prakash and Bajpai flew with Parker on this mission. Gremlins made their presence felt yet once again, when the fourth aircraft, being flown by Balasubramanian was rendered unserviceable due to snags before take off.

Parker arrived over Murid, and identifying two Sabres on the ground made a strafing run on them. One of the Sabres burst into flames emitting smoke, while the other did not. This left a doubt in the pilots minds that the aircraft could have been some dummy/decoy aircraft.

As the aircraft were pulling out of the raid, one of the pilots noticed an aerial mast dead ahead in their path, with wires dangling from it. This mast was not marked out in the map, and its presence slightly unnerved the pilots, who thought it as some anti-aircraft measure.

The aircraft had to take drastic evasive measures to avoid crashing into the mast or its wires. In all probability, it was an unmarked aerial on the Indian maps, but it did unnerve the formation for a brief moment. A second strafing run was made over Murid, including the hangers and installations, which looked like housing some aircraft was carried out. But the damage if any was difficult to assess.

Murid received further attention the very next morning. This time Sqn. Ldr. Bharadwaj was leading the mission, with Heble, Karumbaya and Deoskar. This time they struck gold. A transport was destroyed by Bharadwaj, while Karumbaya and Deuskar attacked and destroyed two fighters which were later identified as MiG-19s.

The squadron flew its next major number of sorties on the 10th of December. In response to the Indian Army's call for close support in the Chamb sector, the Lightnings contributed to the support requests of the ground forces. First among the aircraft was a two-aircraft strike by Sqn. Ldr. R.N. Bharadwaj and Karumbaya. They engaged some Pakistani tank and gun positions across the Manawar Tawi.

It was during one such attacking run that Karumbaya felt his Hunter shudder under the impact of bullets from a Sabre that had bounced him. Karumbaya broke left, with his tanks and aircraft holed, but Bharadwaj who was coming behind Karumbaya engaged the Sabre and shot it down. The aircraft, which crashed in Indian territory, confirmed the kill. Bharadwaj then shepherded Karumbaya who flew his damaged aircraft back to Pathankot.

PAF Sabres were very much active that day over Chamb. Hunters from No.27 Sqn. too, flew missions to Chamb. One Hunter flown by Sqn. Ldr. M.K. Jain was hit by groundfire and was lost along with the pilot. Ground fire also hit and damaged one of No.20 Squadron's aircraft. Sqn. Ldr. Rozario and Heble were flying over the area when Rozario's Hunter was hit repeatedly by ack-ack fire. Rozario with great difficulty flew the aircraft back to Pathankot, with Heble acting as a shepherd.

When Rozario put the aircraft onto the runway, he discovered that the tyres were punctured by ack-ack, and the resultant force on the undercarriage sheared the landing

gear off, as the aircraft hit the runway on its belly and slithered out of control over a distance. It finally came to a stop after some distance, and Rozario walked out of the Hunter unscathed. The belly landed Hunter was badly damaged, and was sent for repairs, flying only after the war. Heble had meanwhile safely landed back.

The squadron carried out about ten sorties on December 11th. After a week of hectic operational flying from December 4th to the 10th, the squadron was withdrawn from the forward base to Hindon, where it was to take a break from operations and give the pilots some rest.

All the pilots were pulled back to Hindon, leaving behind the ground crew and about five of them. No.20 Sqn was relieved by aircraft of the No.7 *Battle Axes* Sqn and MiG-21s from the No.30 Squadron. Battle Axes in fact shared the ground crew facilities of the Lightnings. For the remaining six days of the war, some of the five pilots left behind at Pathankot flew missions along with No.7 Squadron in their aircraft. The Hunters also flew some air defence sorties from Hindon during the remaining days of the war.

The general mood of the squadron was that after a brief rest period of a week or so, the squadron will again be sent to the frontline. All the pilots were very eager to fly back to Pathankot and start operations again. But as the days went by, the probability of the war coming to an end, increased with the imminent collapse of the Pakistan Army in the Eastern Sector, the pilots felt somewhat disappointed at an opportunity being lost.

They would not know it, but fate had decreed that the Lightnings would soon face a bigger challenge, and instructions were already being issued in that direction. Soon after the move to Hindon, Wg. Cdr. Parker was brought to Air HQ for some top secret discussions. There at the meeting, he was asked, whether his Hunters would be able to operate out of an airfield in Visakhapatnam, off the coast of Bay of Bengal in Andhra Pradesh. Parker had neither heard of Visakhapatnam's airfield, nor had ever been there, but by the demands of the situation, felt that the Hunters could land on the runway employing their drag chutes to cut their run short. The advent of the cease-fire made such a move unnecessary.

When a tally was compiled for the Lightning at the end of the war, the squadron turned out to be the highest scoring unit in the IAF during the '71 conflict. Since its primary objective had been counter air, the unit had a total of 13 enemy aircraft destroyed on ground. Two F-86*Sabres* were also downed in air combat. There was

one occasion when a hapless Mirage-III found itself for a brief moment in the sight of one of the Hunters. The gun camera film is a treasured souvenir in the squadron, reminding them of the discomfort of the Pakistani Mirage pilot, who jinked and weaved to get out of the firing line of the Hunter flown by A.K. "Bomber" Sharma who had no gun ammo left!

Including the eight days of operational flying, the squadron had flown a total of 121 sorties throughout the war amounting to about 115:30 hours. In this period, they fired about 15,000 rounds of cannon ammo, dropped about 17,000 lbs. of HE bombs, 1720 litres of napalm and 548 rockets at enemy targets. The claim of 13 enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground included four C-130 Hercules, one Twin Otter, one Viscount and a light-exec aircraft. It is noted that the renowned US Pilot, Brig. Gen. Charles E. Yeager, who was then on deputation to the PAF as an Advisor, lost his USAF Beech Queen Air aircraft in Chaklala, which might well have been lost to the Lightning's onslaught.

For this impressive performance, the squadron commander, Wg. Cdr. C.V. Parker and Sqn. Ldr. R.N. Bharadwaj received the Maha Vir Chakra (MVC). Five pilots earned the Vir Chakra (VrC) award. Lt. Arun Prakash, Fg. Off. S. Balasubramanian, Sqn. Ldr. Jal Maneksha Mistry (posthumous), Fg. Off. B.C. Karumbaya and Flt. Lt. A.L. Deoskar received the Vir Chakra (VrC) award.

Flt. Lt. C.S. Dhillon received the Vayu Sena Medal (VSM). There were two Mentioned-in-Dispatches and 10 commendations from the CAS/AOC. In fact the Lightnings take pride in the fact that Lt. Arun Prakash was awarded the Vir Chakra (VrC) under the 'Air Force List' rather than the 'Navy List'.

In the Investiture Ceremony, Wg. Cdr. C.V. Parker introduced Lt. Arun Prakash to the Air Chief. "You remember Arun Prakash, Sir, he was the one wearing the PT shoes on the day of your inspection." It goes without saying that Lal was amused. Today Vice Admiral Arun Prakash is the commandant of the National Defence Academy.

No.20 Sqn moved back to Pathankot immediately after the rest period of the war. Wg. Cdr. Parker handed over command to Wg. Cdr. Lele in December 1972 and left to DSSC, Wellington as a Directing Staff (Air). The squadron stayed at Pathankot till 1975 when it moved back to Hindon.

In 1981, a decision was taken to move the squadron to the East to Hashimara, where they formed the first formation aerobatics team of the Indian Air Force under Wg.

Cdr. Ben Brar. Then started almost a decade of flying as the IAF's showpiece till March 1989, when the Thunderbolts flew their last public display. The Squadron received the President's Colors in 1992, when it was based in Kalaikonda.

In 1997, the Hunters sang their Swan Song, being replaced with the MiG-27ML *Flogger*. The remaining "Lightning" aircraft being dispersed as gate guardians around the country or kept in storage in Tezpur. The squadron today flies the MiG-27ML proudly. They have a war record to be proud of, and to live up to.

Notes:

- . It subsequently came to light that Fg. Off. K.P. Muralidharan got involved in combat with Flt. Lt. Salim Beg Mirza of the PAF who succeeded in shooting down the Hunter near Pimple Hill, killing Murali.
- . As mentioned in the *History of the Corps of Engineers*.
- . Subsequently found out that one of the pilots was taken POW, the other was killed.
- . All the three pilots who were killed in the Sakesar Strikes - Sqn. Ldr. J.M. Mistry, Flt. Lt. K.L. Malkani and Fg. Off. G.S. Rai - were posthumously decorated with a Vir Chakra after the war.

Acknowledgements:

BHARAT RAKSHAK expresses its thanks to Air Vice Marshal (retd.) C.V. Parker, MVC, VM, the then commander of No.20 *Lightnings* Squadron, for his cooperation and interest in filling in details regarding the role of the squadron during the war. Air Vice Marshal Parker also helped us in providing some of the pictures on display here. Wg. Cdr. F.J. Mehta, VrC graciously supplied us the crest of No.20 Squadron.

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Flying Over East Pakistan

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Tuesday, 13 June 2017 03:29

Written by Gp Capt Anant Bewoor

Hits: 3964

An An-12 pilot recounts his experiences of flying out refugees and supplies during the 1971 Bangladesh War.

The existence of ARC is no longer all hush hush, and what was at one time referred to as Lalu's Circus, after Late Air Marshal L S Grewal, has done some very specialised work that went towards victory in Dec 1971.

After the crack down in East Pakistan in March 1971, there was a deluge of refugees across the borders into Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Assam. Those of us who witnessed the deluge cannot forget the frightened look in their eyes. Those who spoke Bengali heard unimaginable tales of cruelty and massacres. I was to see some of it personally in Chittagong after the surrender, in January 72.

That apart, the airlifting of these refugees was some flying. The AN-12 has just 90 odd seats, and taking each pax to be 100kgs, the max load of 9000 kgs would be reached. Well before the Hercules C-130s reached India, AN-12s from ARC and the IAF, and C-46s were busy ferrying out East Pakistanis from Agartala. For those who have not been to Agartala, the barbed wire marking the border between India and E Pak runs just 15 feet from 02 Dumbell of the extra short runway. Ofcourse one cannot land on Runway 02 because the approach would have been over East Pakistan. An actual case of wrong Runway is of Late Virk. making a Left hand approach on RW 18, he saw RW 20, and rolled out on finals. On query, we heard a meek, "sorry landed on 20".

But each refugee carried just a small bundle of clothes like our dhobi does. They were lightly built, and not one of them weighed more than 50 kgs. So notwithstanding the not so short Runway 18/36, we would pack at least 145 persons and fly out to Guwahati or Kolkata. When families could not be split the figure rose to 155. It was a very efficiently and swiftly executed operation. What is more pertinent is that there was no Fanfare and media glare that accompanied the Hercules airlift, which they later christened OP Bonny Jack. Named after an East Pakistani child adopted by the Americans and named Bonny Jack.

It was not easy doing all this. We all flew between 8 to 10 hrs a day, and night halt was prohibited at Agartala because of security, and at times shelling from across. Weather was dicey as it always is in late March and early April in that part of India. Nav aids were poor, and as far as I can remember our big brother radar in Meghalaya could never get a pick up if there was more than 3 Octa of clouding. On one occasion the rain was so terribly thick that I was sure that there was no air for the engines to breathe, only water, surely a flame out was imminent.

Unfortunately no records have been kept either in 44 Squadron or 25 Squadron nor in ARC about the airlift. We did much more in ARC by way of what we called the Joy Bangla Courier. The special tasks continued all the way till 03 Dec 71 when the first air strikes took place on IAF bases. Then Air HQs asked us to vacate the skies for their business. And what wonderful business they demonstrated.

Another major airlift was from Sarsawa to Kumbigram and Agartala. Eight C-46s, taking off before sunrise, dropping cargo and returning to Sarsawa in the evening for a repeat the next day. About 15 hrs of flying. This was in about Oct 71. Really a sky train.

Big Brother radar in Meghalaya never picked up a single aeroplane as far as I can remember. An amazing SU. Must be better today? Any way we did not vacate the skies. I also flew what was designated as the Interim Govt of Bangladesh to Delhi from Kolkata. Nazar Ul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Col Osmani and one more person. My father was interested in the autograph of Col Osmani because he was credited with planning of OP GIBALTAR, the 65 conflict. I think that except for the Col, all were assassinated with Mujib later in the coup at Dacca.

The evening that the first strikes took place, 03 Dec, we started "sweeping" E Pak for their radar orbat. it had been catalogued very well over the last six months. This is no secret. Its a part of the deal. I am sure both sides still do it regularly, and with greater sophistication. My log book shows that I did a sweep from about 1830 hrs for nearly two hours. then off we went to the West for some more of the same.

I flew on 6th and 7th for about 3 1/2 hrs each. I was delighted to hear Big Brother radar confirming the presence of fighters near me on the 7th. Later I came to know that we were alone on 6th Dec, some one had just forgotten we were up there.

By the 7th evening the air battle in the East had been wrapped up. So on the 8th, while heading for Guwahati from Sarsawa we were advised at Kishanganj to " maintain your heading, direct routing to Guwahati approved". In our AN-12 we were convinced that this was a ruse, and somebody wanted to clobber us over E Pak. Like good boys we turned North for Bagdogra. A stern voice said, "Why are you turning, maintain easterly heading and proceed directly to Guwahati". A bit of non-standard R/T natter took place, and finally we decided to use our Authentication sheets to ascertain that our orders were from the right guys. Probably the first case of an aircraft asking Tower to authenticate itself.

So there we were, on a bright afternoon of 8th Dec 71, flying across E Pak at about 8000 mtrs. Were we being used as decoys? I know the Gnats were nearby. the feeling was exhilarating, and one felt very very proud of the air supremacy we had established. And then guess what, we flew back the same way to Kolkata the same day. I did it again on 9th Dec and also on 11th Dec on our way to Kumbigram from where we went to GGT. In GGT, were the Gnats, and by then Nixon had ordered the 7th Fleet into the Bay of Bengal. The supreme confidence of the Gnat pilots at GGT to take on the air power of the 7th Fleet was electrifying. Understandable given the air situation that these pilots had achieved by 11th Dec 71. Ofcourse ignorance is bliss, but so what, the josh was there. A few days later I went to Sarsawa for flying to Leh.

The end of the war was not in sight, what Tangail had achieved was unknown, though Bijoy Pandey will have much to tell you about a jeep that he dropped into a lake. The normal route to Leh is well known to both us and the PAF. So flying to Leh during a shooting war was not a ' milk run'. PAF Fighters in Northern Territories were quite capable of nipping across and taking pot shots at AN-12s flying at 8.7 Kms over Kar Tso. Many may not know, but there is what is called the "Escape Route" out of Leh. This is followed in case the ac does not climb due to engine failure or pressurisation failure, and it involves flying below mountain tops. Navigators and pilots of Chandigarh based sqns are very familiar about ' escape routes'. A mistake and you enter a dead end valley, and the ac is not climbing, oh boy are you in trouble. The trick is to recognise the correct turnings and valleys, many look blind alleys, but are not. The credit for mapping this escape route must go to the pioneers of 44 Squadron in the 60s. It has never changed, indicating the precise job done by those aircrew. My salutations to all those from 44 Squadron involved in that enterprise,

I have flown that route many times as an instructor, and would you believe it, I flew it Reverse while going to Leh on 16th Dec. Entered at Rohtang and so on, and did it twice that day. I am not aware whether the IAF AN-12s did it also. We all had decided that no PAF fighter would find us in the valley and even if he did, there was no way he could put in an attack. I would surely welcome views on this from my fighter friends.

A few more trips across East Pakistan on 17th and then 20 Dec, finally ending with being the first AN-12 to land at Chittagong on 7th Jan 72. The war was over, but the arrival was no routine matter. Our Navigator was Legha, very senior to me, and when he advised descent we found ourselves over the Ganges delta, nothing except mud flats and water. We had to get up again, and tried desperately to contact Chittagong with no joy. All frequencies recieved from Dhaka remained silent. After coming over Chittagong, we saw the pock marks made by the Sea Hawks from Vikrant, and they looked repaired. but no R/T contact. Finally we did what all pilots are taught to do, we flew over the long pockmarked Runway and waggled our wings, lo and behold, we got a green very light signal and Lamp signal on finals. There we heard more about what really

happened in the first few days after the infamous orders, " sort them out" were issued by Yahya Khan to Tikka Khan.

Everyone had advised me to bring back war booty. I first asked for and got a heavy brass key chain from hotel Agrabad. Back at the airport, I saw a PIA step ladder used for Daks and Fokkers. I loaded that into the AN-12, and returned triumphant with my war booty. I still have the key chain. The ladder was outside my room while in ARC. Children would come to the Mess and play with it, pushing it all over the mess premises. I took it with me to Sarsawa but had to leave it behind when I went to FIS in Jan 73. I dont think Wingco Dogra would have approved. I am still looking for it, cannot be used for any ac in this century. Besides its war booty.

I am waiting for Parvez Jamasji to tell us about his exploits with Chandan Singh across the Meghna river. There are so any of us still around who can give their personal experiences about 65 and 71. Why not Kargil and OP Meghdoot. That too is history, is it not?.

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Thunder over Dacca

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Tuesday, 13 June 2017 03:34

Written by Air Vice Marshal B K Bishnoi

Hits: 4999

We were at the aircraft at 0635 hours. The Squadron Engineering Officer, Flight Lieutenant B.S. Ahluwalia, was at the tarmac with his efficient look and ever present smile. "Sir, all aircraft are ready, armed and double tested." I returned his smile, "Thanks". Technical airmen standing around looked grim and somewhat differently but there was an air of good-will and affection in that charged atmosphere. They wished us good luck.

I was choked with emotion and could only nod my head and wave back at them from the cockpit of my MiG-21. We lined upon the runway, which was still largely obscured with fog, not more than a third of its length visible. Flying control cleared me for take off, and stated that visibility was 600-700 yards.

Four MiG-21s got airborne through the fog and headed for the target. Soon we left the fog below. Hills, in front which stretched up to the East Pakistan border were in all their glory in the morning sun, calming one's nerves.

We flew past them and entered enemy territory, which was flat land covered with a thick sheet of fog. Ground features were not visible, map reading was useless we had no choice but to press on guided by the planned time and course. It was actually

delightful to be skimming over the white sheet of fog below, with my No.3 and No.4 stretched to my right and slightly above in broad front battle formation, while from time to time, I could see our escorts, Flt. Lt. Manbir Singh (Bunny) and Flt. Lt. D.M. Subiya, their MiG-21s fitted with air-to-air missiles, some distance behind us, and a clear blue sky above us. God was in His heaven and all was well with the world.

However, such serenity was rudely disturbed by a crackle on the R/T with a hushed voice saying, "careful". I recognised it to be that of Wing Commander Gole, warning me of the presence of hostile aircraft over Dacca, perhaps a CAP. Barely two minutes before we reached our pull-up point, the fog suddenly cleared and I saw the ground, some roads, and a big factory at the river bend spewing white smoke, which was our last check point. We were, now, less than a minute away from Tezgaon. I broke R/T silence.

"Tiger One pulling up. RPM 90%. Target on our left 10 o'clock." My No.3 confirmed, "Tiger Three, contact." As I gained height I saw the entire expanse of Tezgaon airfield stretched to my left with its single runway hangars flying control, and zigzag pathways leading to camouflage aircraft pens. There seemed no activity, except for one Sabre getting refueled next to their ORP at one end of the runway. Then I spotted another Sabre rolling down the runway for take-off.

"Buzzy, there is a badmash (enemy) on the take-off run, middle of the runway." I told our escort leader.

Whoosh.....one more Sabre passed below me, flying from left to right.

"There is one more below us, Bhoop Sir. In contact with both. Tail of your formation is cleared."

That relieved me of keeping track of the Sabres and allowed me to concentrate on the task in hand. I was not in position to attack the Sabre which were getting refueled but looked for any other aircraft in the open - there were none in sight. Flying low level, at the speed of over 900km/h, it was not easy to scan an unknown airfield and look for small targets.

I went in for the hangers, radio and communication installations. We made two passes each and fired the 57mm rockets and left with smoke rising from a number of places on the airfield. It was difficult to assess the exact damage done. The excitement of the

first attack on the enemy airfield had not ebbed, when I heard Bunny calling his No.2, Dadoo (Flt. Lt. D.M. Subiya).

"Dadoo where are you?"

No reply.

"Dadoo report position, we are heading back."

A laboured and excited transmission from Dadoo announced,

"I am in combat with a Sabre over Dacca."

By then we had already set course for home. Dadoo was alone, far behind us, in aerial combat over enemy country. I intervened "Tiger One Dadoo, your fuel state."

"Nine hundred litres."

Heavens, even if he shot down the Sabre with this fuel state he would hardly make it back to Tezpur. I ordered,

"Dadoo disengage immediately. Climb to 6km on course to base."

A few seconds later he called,

"Disengaged. Climbing."

"Dadoo at 6 km fly for range."

I asked my formation to throttle back, reduce speed, spread out, and look for Dadoo's aircraft. I informed our radar control of the situation and requested them to scan for Dadoo. Soon the radar reported Dadoo's position as 6 o'clock, 20km behind us. And his tail was clear.

"Dadoo, fuel?"

"600 litres."

To me it looked a very grim situation, touch and go. I called up Gauhati.

"Bull Dog Tiger One. Formation returning 6 km. Ten minutes away. Escort 2 very low on fuel. Alert rescue helicopter, and direct approach and landing for him."

"Tiger, Bull Dog. Roger".

A little later I saw Dadoo's MiG-21 at 9 o'clock to me and we were just crossing into our own territory. The Meghalaya Hills were below us. At least one problem of ejecting over enemy territory was over. Now it was a matter of Dadoo's skill and will power to coax his aircraft back to base on the limited fuel remaining in the tank.

"Dadoo, your fuel?"

"400 litres."

"Not bad. Maintain height and power. I am at 3 o'clock, 2000 yards, level. Descend only after airfield is in sight".

"Roger."

As the airfield neared, his fuel state became lower and lower and finally he said that the fuel indicator was reading zero. By then he was on finals, but held on to his courage with both hands. Although he had the choice to eject to safety, he did not exercise that option and decided instead to bring the aircraft home intact. I kept my fingers crossed and prayed.

He was on short finals, appeared normal. With a great sigh I saw him touch down on the runway. As he turned off at the end of the runway his engine stopped. It could have happened in the air some seconds before and with what results! Difference between life and death was not more than 20 litres of fuel. A two second delay in disengagement from air combat would have meant the story with a different end. Who does not believe in luck?

When we entered dispersal after landing, I saw the ground crew gather around my aircraft touching the rocket rails, which were now empty. There were two bullet holes in the rear fuselage. A hurrah went up. Like the pilot's satisfaction of having reached the target and destroyed it, for the first time it dawned that the joy of our Airmen who

had toiled for hours to make the aircraft cent per cent fit for flying and ensured that the weapons were loaded and tested with utmost care, was no less when they found the weapons gone and the aircraft had performed flawlessly. We pilots could now relate as equal partners with the Airmen in the common task in safeguarding our country.

I flew two more missions to Tezgaon later in the day. We fired at vital installations but saw no aircraft on the ground or in the air. However during the third sortie, I saw a medium sized transport aircraft parked near a hanger which I destroyed. Unfortunately there was little intelligence available on aircraft dispersal areas and location shelters and important installations on Tezgaon airfield.

Perhaps we were achieving little except for harassing the Pakistanis. I conveyed the above observations to Headquarters, Eastern Air Command through our station with a suggestion that instead of rocket attacks, we should go in with heavy bombs, attacking the runways at Tezgaon and Kurmitola. It was difficult to pick up aircraft in camouflaged shelters and then destroy them, but should instead make the runways unusable, thus grounding enemy aircraft and preventing any reinforcements from flying in.

The above decision came on the 5th evening. The 'First Supersonics' was given the task to mount the first strikes to bomb the runways of Tezgaon. Options available were to make one low level, high speed pass at about 45° angle to the runway and drop bombs. In near level flight which was a recommended method, more to ensure safety of one's own aircraft against the anti-aircraft fire but at the cost of accuracy and damage to the target. This would have required comparatively large number of sorties to hit and damage the runway, a good method provided there were those many resources and time at one's disposal.

The other option was to undertake a steep glide bombing attack along the length of the runway. This method ensured much greater accuracy, deep penetration of the bombs before exploding and, therefore, causing far greater damage. The disadvantage was that this was far more risky where anti-aircraft guns would have more lethality as the aircraft stayed much longer in their gun-sights.

This also removed the element of surprise and varying direction of attack, as one just had to attack along a fixed direction thus increasing the vulnerability. We debated this issue at great length and opted for the steep glide mode as a calculated risk vis-à-vis

the assured results and quick denial of runways for use of the PAF fighters and keeping them on the ground for the rest of the war.

I led the first bombing mission on the morning of December 8th. It was a fog free and clear day with unlimited visibility. Four MiG-21s took on and at headed low level; skimming at tree heights to avoid radar detection. Navigation had ceased to be a problem after so many trips to and from Dacca in the previous days, it was akin to a home base by now.

We arrived at our usual pull up point (IP) unhindered. From there we were to get behind each other in a stream, pull up in a steep climb to attain a height of about 4500 metres before assuming a near 60° dive, aiming at the runway. We had allotted certain portions of the runway for attack to each member of the formation in order to spread its damage along the full length. We had practiced this often at our firing practices.

At the IP breaking R/T silence I called "Tiger One. Switches on RPM 100%. Pulling up".

I heard the click ... click ... click indicating acknowledgment by numbers 2, 3, and 4 going up. In a zoom I saw the runway appear on my left at about 1030 position. It seemed all quiet on the airfield, no movements of any kind. I looked for any CAP-found none. At over 4km height, my speed had dropped from 900 to 450 km/h, controls felt heavy and sluggish. I rolled over on my back and dropped the nose of the aircraft.

The Tezgaon runway was appearing in front of me, I seemed to be in a near vertical dive, that is how it appears at 60°. I slowly aligned the nose of the aircraft along the length of the runway aiming the gun sight at a point about top quarter of the runway and held it steady there. I was in a screaming dive now, speed was fast increasing to 700, 800, 900 and approaching 1000 km/h.

I felt stationary, as if suspended with a thread on top of the runway. Suddenly a large number of black and white puffs started appearing in front of me and than all around me....fast firing, A-A guns were firing away. I was nearing the bombing point, gun sight rock steady on the target.

Wait, wait, NOW!! I pressed the trigger and felt the bomb release as the aircraft became lighter by 1000kg. I pulled out of the dive and turned hard left to get out of

the firing line of the A-A guns. It was gratifying to see two smoking craters on the runway, right in the middle of the top quarter.

I climbed up to 5km to see results of the other three MiG-21s. It was hard to believe, eyes could not have lied, all bombs had fallen on the runway, along its entire length and a great pall of dust and smoke was rising from Tezgaon.

"Good Show Tiger formation. I think we have done it." I heard the clicks on R/T acknowledging my transmission. We must have left the Pakistanis stunned with our unconventional mode of attack and results. This attack had actually sealed their fate. I led another bombing attack late in the afternoon on the same day. On approaching the Tezgaon airfield I saw reddish brown patches on the runway.

They apparently had done some emergency repairs on the craters. We scored direct hits again along the length of the runway leaving another eight fresh craters to keep them busy for the night. There was fierce anti-aircraft fire encountered. But aircraft returned undamaged. Not to give them breathing space, I once again led another bombing mission to Tezgaon the next morning, December 7th.

The runway had not been repaired during the night and we added to their plight by adding another eight craters to the previous eight. During these attacks, we had also given enough practice to their anti-aircraft gunners and so at last they scored a hit on the left wing of my aircraft. I felt a big thud and the aircraft shook violently.

By then I was nearing my firing range, pressed on and released the bombs and pulled out of the dive. I looked inside the cockpit - aft instruments read normal, aircraft responded to controls and throttle. All was well. The gunner would have been delighted had he known that he had scored a pin point hit, but there was no way that I could have told him. The damage was a 9 inch hole.

Since Tezgaon runways were not repaired after December 7th, we shifted our attention to Kurmitola which was the second airfield at Dacca. It was possible that the Pakistanis might shift their aircraft by road to this airfield and operate from there.

This time I took my personal 35mm camera with me to take snaps of the damage caused to Tezgaon and to take pictures of the airfield for general study of its layout, important locations, dispersal of aircraft and the location of their shelters, because we had no such information from our Command or Air Headquarters.

Copies of these photographs including one showing bombs exploding on Kurmitola runway were sent to Headquarters, Eastern Air Command with the compliments of the First Supersonics. EAC felt satisfied with the results and did not feel the need to mount any more sorties to damage the runways further, and these remained out of commission till the end of the war.

When I visited Dacca a day after the surrender, I went to see the runway at Tezgaon. From the ground, it looked like the surface of the moon, full of craters along its length, with high mounds of earth around their periphery. I took some photographs of those. These craters measured about 22 feet in diameter and 20 feet in depth.

No runway in the world could survive as many craters of that size with temporary repairs. This was clear from the fact that when I went to see the PAP Operations Room and crew room of their Sabre Squadron (No.14), date of the last briefing on the board read as 5 Dec '71. No flying took place at Tezgaon from the morning of December 6th, when we dropped first of the bombs the airfield being neutralized within 48 hours of war.

On December 7th, the US Government wanted to evacuate their nationals from Dacca and asked Pakistan's permission to land a Boeing 707 at Dacca. Pakistan told them that the Indian Air Force was very active in that region and they could not assure safety of the Boeing. The fact was that they did not want to announce that their runways had been knocked off as it would have demoralised both the military and the nation.

Instead they asked the Americans to request India for safe passage. The Indian Government called the Pakistan bluff and promptly agreed to cease air operations over Dacca for a given period of 4 hours. Those four hours went by and no Boeing arrived - no further requests were made by the Americans either. However, the U.S. thanked India for its gesture, but this was another proof of total destruction of the PAF airfields in the East by December 6th.

Amazingly, as soon as I alighted from a chopper at Tezgaon on the day after surrender, the first person who came rushing to me was a Russian. He had learnt from another member of our party that I had flown one of the MiG-21s which had bombed the runways. He asked me point blank to tell him honestly which kind of bomb sight we used for such pinpoint bombing and effectiveness.

He said he saw bombs falling for days nowhere else but on the runways. I thanked him for the compliment and reminded him that we were flying their MiG-21s and they should know as to which gun sights they had provided to us. He shook his head in disbelief. He had read the PAF claims that Indian MiG-21s in the east were using laser gun sights. No one was ready to believe the truth that what we actually only used the same old primitive fixed gun sight for our bombing.

The accuracy achieved was through our extensive training practice orientation, selection of attack techniques appropriate to the situation, sheer determination, motivation and guts in the face of enemy fire. The No.28 'First Supersonics' were soon named 'Runway Busters' by the C-in-C of EAC, Air Marshal H.C. Dewan. We had earned our spurs and found a place in the history of air warfare.

Absence of air-support to the Pakistani Army in Bangladesh severely limited their operations. The Indian Army on the other hand were relieved of the fear of air attacks by PAF aircraft. The Indian Air Force had complete freedom of the air in East Bengal.

Besides the Indian Navy which had asked for such an assurance before they would commit their aircraft carrier in The Bay of Bengal, was given that guarantee on December 7th. INS *Vikrant* then lent its might in no small measure. This had been a classic counter-air operation with few parallels.

In the east, It was a war of movement. The Pakistani forces had to be encircled, if possible destroyed or captured and thus made ineffective. The aim was to liberate Bangladesh. By now, international pressure, specially from the Americans, was mounting to stop the war in the east, perhaps in an effort to bale out Pakistan and prevent its disintegration.

The Seventh Fleet of the United States Navy was heading for the Bay of Bengal, indicating such an intention. The Soviets, who were batting for us with vetoes in The United Nations were urging India to hurry up. Urgency, therefore, was growing to expedite the fall of Dacca. There were innumerable rivers and streams in East Bengal. 500 bridges of these were blown up by Pakistani troops to stop or slow down advance of the Indian Army.

Pakistanis had built strong defences along the other routes to stoutly resist the advancing Indians. From 7th to 14th December, the 'First Supersonics' flew a very large number of missions in close support of the Army in Maulvi Bazar, Commila, Narsingde, Lalmai, Mainamati and Dacca University, using both rockets and bombs to

destroy the Pakistani Army's heavily defended positions and thus defeat their will to resist. This more than helped in ensuring an early passage to Dacca and the rest is history.

On 14th December I had just returned from a close-support mission in the morning from Mainamati Cantonment when Group Captain Wollen came rushing to our operations room and said, "Bhoop, a very critical and urgent task has come from Air HQ. There is a very important meeting going on at Circuit House, Dacca and this building needs to be attacked at 1120 hrs."

I told him that, first it was already 1055 and it required 21 minutes to be at Dacca and then "Where in God's name is the Circuit House located in Dacca?"

He said, "If you hurry up you can just about make it. Here, I have tourist map of Dacca and here, next to this road crossing is the Circuit House." I looked back at him, the Circuit House was part of a densely populated area of Dacca and from the air one could see hundreds of road crossings, how was one to pick that one? I simply said, "Yes Sir, it shall be done." I borrowed that map from him to be taken along and with this, search for that Circuit House after getting overhead Dacca.

For this mission I was taking four MiG-21s loaded with 32 high explosive rockets each. I was strapped in the cockpit of the aircraft and started the engine, just when I saw one of our Flight Commanders waving a paper and run towards me. "Sir, this is for you." It read, Target is Government House, repeat Government House and not Circuit House. Confirm understood. Best of luck and good shooting. Mall."

I raised my thumb to confirm that I had noted the change. I quickly scanned the tourist map in my lap and located the Government House and taxied out. At this stage I did not inform of the change to the other three members of my team which consisted of Flight Lieutenant Vinod Bhatia, Flight Lieutenant Raghavachari and Flight Lieutenant Malhi as I did not want to announce this on R/T for the whole world to know.

Airborne and as we were approaching Dacca and had barely a minute to go, I gave the new target to my numbers 2, 3 and 4. I described the rough location of the target and asked them to look for it. Flight Lieutenant Bhatia spotted it first, calling that the target was at 11 o'clock, 500 yards away. It was a magnificent old styled palatial building with a high dome, situated in the middle of a lush green compound. There were quite a few vehicles inside the entrance gate.

I did a "chakkar" around it to reconfirm its identity and then ordered the attack taking the building from broad side. I aimed at the room below the dome, others took on other portions. We did two passes each and fired 128 rockets into the Government House.

By the second attack smoke and dust could be seen rising from many locations from the abode the mightiest in East Pakistan. It obviously broke the backbone of the civilian Government. Two days later General Niazi, the Supreme Commander of the Pakistan Military in East Pakistan was to surrender to the Indian Defense Forces along with 93,000 troops.

On December 14th evening we were told that the Pakistani Army from their headquarters in Dacca Cantonment had shifted to the buildings of Dacca University, inside the town. They had to be flushed out in an operation dubbed "Street Fighting".

On the morning of 15th, I led two missions of four MiG-21s each. In addition, No.28 Squadron mounted another eight missions. Dacca University was in the middle of the town and had very high buildings around it. We had to fly in between and below their tops.

It was a great experience flying at 1000km/h thru these narrow corridors and having people actually looking below from the windows above. An unusual sight to say the least. We made two passes each and struck hard delivering 256 rockets without compliments to the Pakistani Army housed there. A total of 1280 57mm rockets were fired into Dacca University buildings by the 'First Supersonics' on that day.

I was later told that the same evening, the top brass of the Army from University Camp had shifted to the International Hotel which was a safe haven declared by the Government of India. General Niazi who until the previous day was claiming that he could go on fighting for months, was left with little choice and had to face the realities.

He was made to take the ultimate decision to surrender and salvage whatever honour remained. He conveyed his desire to do so on the morning of 16 December 1971, and the actual surrender was taken the same evening. Pakistan's flag was lowered, not to be raised again. 'Sonar Bangla' had become a reality.

Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal, Chief of Air Staff, gave a press briefing at Vayu Bhawan in New Delhi at 1130 hours on 19th February 1972 and fielded media questions. Following are some of the extracts relating to the major events of air operations in the Eastern Theatre;

(a) Taking the Eastern front first the aim was absolutely clear - we had to achieve quick victory in order to bring the war to a close.

(b) By the evening of December 13th, the Indian Army was encircling Dacca, still at a distance of 10 to 15 miles. At that time it would have taken the Army perhaps another week or ten days to bring in heavy artillery and tanks needed for the siege of Dacca. Air reconnaissance had shown that strong points had been built up on its out-skirts with a garrison well-armed, well supplied with food. The Pakistan Army was apparently capable of holding off our land forces for quite a period of time. That apparently was their intention.

(c) On December 14th morning.....we got information in New Delhi that the Governor of East Pakistan, Dr. Malik, was holding a meeting in Government House Dacca at noon (Dacca time) that day. The 14th, when certain policy matters were to be discussed and Islamabad would be informed of the decisions.

We picked up this message about 11:45 (Dacca time). We sent out the message to our Headquarters, Eastern Air Command at Shillong to "please put on a strike as soon as you can after noon" (Dacca Time) against Government House. Our MiG-21s got across at 20 minutes past 12 (Dacca Time). 35 minutes from the time we picked up the telephone at Air Headquarters. They hit the Government House pretty accurately.

Dr. Malik resigned forthwith. He went into an air shelter (as we have been told by a UN official, Mr. Kefly who happened to be with him at that time). The moment first rockets struck Government House, he got out a paper and with his ball point pen wrote out his resignation. It was a dramatic incident. That really spelt the end of Pakistan's regime in Bangladesh. I believe that cut the ground under General Niazi's feet.

(d) General Niazi was later given the same treatment. We heard intelligence again from our sources, that the Army had moved out of Kurmitola. We had kept Kurmitola under constant air attacks day and night. They got fed up and moved into Dacca city and occupied a part of the Dacca University Campus.

After giving the treatment to Government House, we switched over to the University campus and between the afternoon of 14th and evening of 15th, the IAF put 1500

rockets and several thousand rounds of ammunition into the Campus....calling on Niazi to surrender - which he did on the 18th and the war came to an end.

I am told by the Air Force people who were at the surrender that Niazi was asked as to why he packed off so quickly after having made a very definite statement on the 13th evening about defending Dacca for months. He was unable to speak at that time, possibly for emotion or the lack of ability to speak. But he turned around and pointed to the Wings of our Air Force Officers.

Later he said he had not slept for the past 12 nights, and just could not carry on, nor could his troops. We also have intercepts of messages passing between Dacca and Islamabad which make very interesting reading. "We have been bombed as nobody has ever been bombed."

In one case, an enquiry went out to the Operations Room at Dacca for the Officer-In-Charge. Colonel Ajawan answered. "Colonel Sahib has gone to International Hotel. The Major has gone, the Captain has gone, the Lieutenant has gone, in fact, I am only here, they have all gone now."

So you can see this was the situation brought about in Dacca by the Indian Air Force long before the Army could actually tackle Dacca itself. In the final surrender, I think, we have a right to claim an honourable part.

NOTE: The First Supersonics were awarded "Battle Honours" in recognition of their share in the victory for Bangladesh.

Source: Vayu Aerospace, January 1997 Excerpts from "THUNDER OVER DACCA" by Air Vice Marshal (retd.) B.K. Bishnoi

Air Battle over Dacca

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Tuesday, 13 June 2017 03:42

Written by Polly Singh

Hits: 4257

On the morning of 04 Dec 71, No 37 Squadron 'the Black Panthers' lovingly called the "Black Panties" by other IAF squadrons, launched their very first mission of the war, with four Hunters. This was the first Squadron to get the camera nose Hunter (FR

Mk 10) and had already flown several recce missions in to East Pakistan since July '71.

The Hunters were configured with four 100 Gal long range tanks and only gun ammo. The mission was lead by the CO, Wg Cdr SP 'Supi' Kaul (later Chief of the Air staff) with Flt Lt SK 'Billu' Sangar as no 2 and Sqn Ldr AM Mascarenhas as no 3 and Fg Offr Harish 'Khappe' (left handed) Masand as no 4. The mission was search and destroy targets of opportunity at Tezgaon airfield, which was at 181 NMs with a small detour for the IP- Rupsi, while the Range of Action of the Hunter at LO-LO was 167 NM in that configuration.

TOT was 0705 and a pair of MiG-21 FLs from 4 Sqn out of Guwahati was to RV overhead the target to tackle the CAP if any. A second mission by 17 Sqn Hunters was also to be in the area a few mins behind this force.

Mascarenhas' aircraft did not start and the 3 aircraft were airborne on time at 0630 into a blue sky with limitless visibility. However, Masand's undercarriage failed to retract, but he kept tagging along for nearly 30-40 NMs trying to raise it, finally managing to raise it with the emergency override.

2 mins after leaving the IP at low level, Masand on the left as a single aircraft, saw two silver Sabres (PAF 14 sqn ac out of Tezgaon, Dacca) swinging from their 3'0' clock to 6 'o'clock at about 5 Nm. Having reported them the formation continued on course to target as they had no fuel to engage and kept trying to raise the MiG 21 CAP. The Sabres closed in to about 3000 yards by which time the form was at 480 Kts.

At this time the Sabre behind SP Kaul dropped his tanks, and Masand seeing the whoosh of the fuel thought it was a missile launch and ordered a hard turn to the right. Although this Sabre eased off he feared that there would be another Sabre behind his tail, and continued through 180 deg of turn so as to get cross cover from the other section. On rolling out he saw a Sabre shooting at Billu from around 500 yds.

Forgetting to punch his tanks Masand maneuvered behind the Sabre which continued to ignore him and closed to approx 150 yds. But by force of habit, he pressed the camera button rather than the trigger and had closed to less than 100yds by the time he dropped the trigger and fired. At this time the two were at approx 500-700 feet of the ground and the Sabre reversed left to evade, but at that close range, the four guns blew

him up (on ground they found that Massand had fired only 2 rounds per gun a total of 8, he was that close).

Masand continued right calling for the form to roll out approx 350 and head home. By then the MiGs were overhead and reported seeing the chute of the Pakistani pilot on R/T (sadly the PAF pilot- Flt Lt Saeed Afzal Khan of 14 sqn PAF is said to have ejected safely but was lynched by Mukti Bahini guerilla fighters). Masand never caught up with the rest of the formation and climbed so as to save fuel, landing with only 100lbs a side.

On the ground he found that the formation that was being shot at was part of the 17 Squadron formation of Sqn Ldr Lele and Fg Offr 'Buster' Bains his course mate which had ended up ahead of time and in the same general area. Buster had 42 holes in his aircraft and was saved by the fact that the Sabres were using only ball ammo. Sqn Ldr Javed Afzal, the PAF formation leader has been incorrectly credited with this kill.

Masand was awarded a Vir Chakra for this action and became the youngest pilot to get an air to air kill in this war being 24 yrs and 8months at the time and hence also the last serving VrC from 1971 to retire. He later went on to command No 28 Sqn (the first supersonics) on the MiG 29 on which he became one of the greatest exponents of the low level aerobatic art. He finally retired as an Air Marshal in 2005.

The Boyra Air Battle - 22 November 1971

Category: [The Bangladesh War 1971](#)

Last Updated: Sunday, 29 March 2015 21:32

Written by P V S Jagan Mohan

Hits: 4232

This is the story of the famous Boyra battle as the world knew it in 2005. A more updated and accurate version of this air battle appears in the book "Eagles over Bangladesh" by P V S Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra.

The air defence of Calcutta sector was the responsibility of No.22 Squadron based in Kalaikunda. The Squadron was a post-65 raised squadron, about five years old. It had been equipped with the HAL built Gnat right from its date of raising in October 1966 at Bareilly. No.22 was part of 5 Wing at Kalaikunda from September 68 onwards. As

warclouds gathered, it operated a detachment from Dum Dum airfield in Calcutta which was activated just in time. The unit was under the command of Wg Cdr BS Sikand, who was a POW in Pakistan in the 1965 War. The detachment at Dum Dum started operating from 22 September onwards to familiarise themselves.

The first fighting broke out at Boyra peninsula on 21st November, when a group of Muktibahini assisted by Indian Army elements had established a foothold in Pakistani territory in the Battle of Garibpur. The Pakistani army brought in a squadron of M-36 Chaffee tanks into the battle. These were promptly taken on by a Squadron of PT-76 Tanks from the 45 Cavalry regiment. In the ensuing battle, 13 of the Pakistani tanks were knocked out for a loss of four of our tanks. To counter his reversals on the ground, the Pakistani Army commander called on for Air support. This promptly materialised on the second day of the battle.

The first intrusion of four F-86 Sabres were picked up in the Jessore area by our radar at 0811 hours. These were the Canadian Sabres operated by No.14 PAF squadron. These were more powerful version of the Sabre powered by the Orenda engine - most of which were smuggled into Pakistan through a clandestine deal organised between Germany and Iran. No.22 Squadron scrambled four Gnats from Dum Dum. However the Sabres had flown back to their territory by the time the Gnats could make it to Boyra.

A second raid by the Pakistanis followed at 1028 hours. An interception could not be carried out in time and the Sabres went off unscathed. However the third strike was not to have the same luck for the Pakistanis.

The pick-up

At around 1448 hours, the radar picked up the four Sabres as they pulled up in a north westerly direction to about 2000' AGL. Within a minute, the ORP at Dum Dum was scrambled. Four Gnats took off by 1451 hours, less than three minutes from the time the Sabres were detected by the radar.

The Fighter controller in the sector was Fg Offr KB Bagchi. He told the formation leader, Flt Lt Roy Andrew Massey, "One O'Clock, 10 Nautical Miles". Massey Replied "Contact, I can see them pull up".

The Sabres seemed to have already carried out several passes in the eight minutes it took the Gnats to reach the Boyra Sailing. The Sabres were commencing to start

another dive - they were at about 1800 feet altitude and diving down to 500' in an attack run.

"Right wing over attack". shouted Bagchi, "half twelve, thousand yards"

"Contact" replied Massey.

"Request type," said Bagchi

"Sabres"

"Shoot" was the command from the Fighter Controller.

It was 1459 hours.

Murder Murder Murder

The four Gnats dived into the attack to bounce the Sabres. The first section of Gnats was of Massey and Fg Offr SF Soares as his No.2. The second section consisted of Flt Lt MA Ganapathy and Fg Offr D Lazarus. As the Gnats dived in, a section of two Sabres pulled out of the attack and placed themselves in an awkward position, just in front of Ganapathy and Lazarus. Ganapathy called out on the R/T 'Murder Murder Murder'. Both the pilots did not waste time on this perfect opportunity. Cannon shells slammed into the pair of Sabres and both the Sabres were badly damaged. The Pakistani pilots promptly ejected out of the Sabres and drifted down to Boyra by parachute. The wreckage fell near Bongaon village

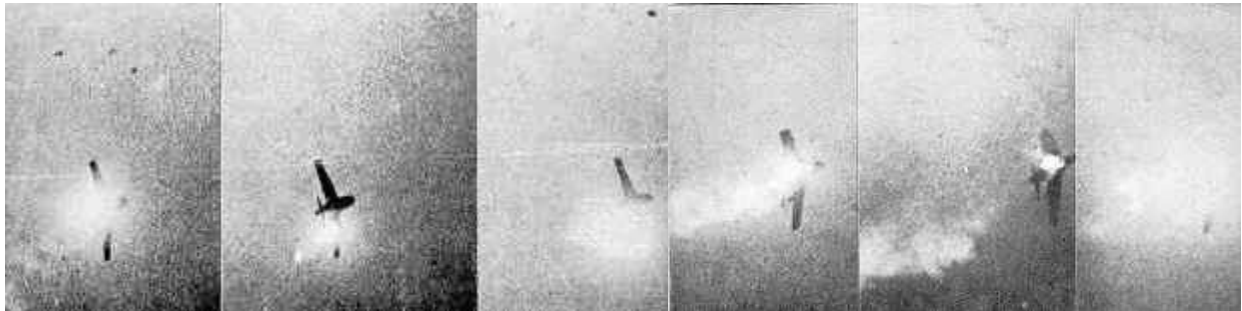
Massey in the meantime pulled up over Ganapathy and Lazarus to latch onto another Sabre. The Sabre broke into Massey's attack forcing him to take a high angle-off burst. The burst missed the target. Massey took another well aimed burst at 700 yards and hit him in the port wing. By that time, Massey's starboard cannon had stopped firing. But the Sabre streaked back into Pakistani territory trailing smoke and fire. Massey himself realised that he was well over East Pakistani airspace in the chase to hit the Sabre. He then turned around and rendezvoused with the rest of his formation.

Beatup

The time was around 1515 hours. An Antonov-12 seconded to the Aviation Research Center was approaching Calcutta and requested Dum Dum airport to land. Dum Dum asked the An-12 to hold in the circuit outside Calcutta 'indefinitely'.

Irrked at the unspecified delay in landing, the pilot asked the tower for the reason. The tower replied 'We have four Gnats beating up the airfield and Calcutta at low level for the past ten minutes!'. The victorious Gnat pilots have returned from the sortie and proceeded to do a royal lowlevel beatup of Calcutta and the environs. The Bengali populace could only glance up in curiosity and amusement at the continuous roar of the Orpheous engines as the Gnats made several passes over the city before landing back at Dum Dum as they started nearing the end of thie

The pilots were greeted by a joyous group of officers and technicians on the ground. It was time for writing down the combat reports and swapping stories. News had come after some time that two Pakistani Pilots were captured by our troops when they landed near Indian positions. They were Flt Lt Parvez Mehdi Qureshi and Fg Offr Khalil Ahmed respectively.



Gun Camera pictures from the Gnat's show two of the Sabre's meeting their end over Boyra.

The gun camera film clearly showed the damage and destruction to three Sabres. and overnight all the three pilots involved became National Heroes. The next day's papers carried the story in the headlines - with pictures of the three pilots supplied by the Ministry of Defence. It had been over Six years since an enemy aircraft was downed in aircombat and this provided just the right filip to a country about to go into war. The Defence Minister, Babu Jagjivan Ram made a visit to Dum Dum along with his wife and the AOC-in-C Dewan. He congratulated the CO, the four pilots and the fighter Controller Bagchi.



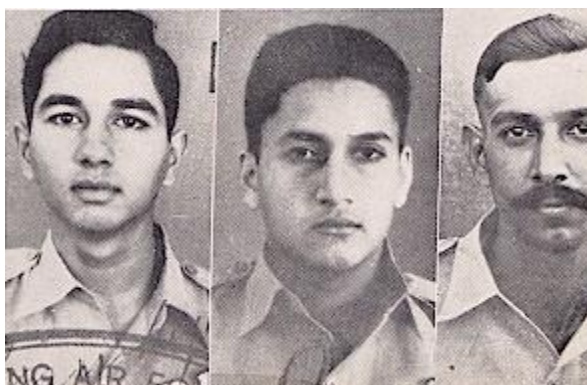
The Defence Minister Shri Babu Jagjivan Ram and his wife Mrs Jagjivan Ram pay a visit to the 'Sabre Slayers'. The AOC-in-C Eastern Command, Air Marshal HC Dewan is standing on the ladder, and the CO of No.22 Sqn, Wg Cdr BS Sikand is sitting besides the cockpit.

Heroes of the Battle, (left to right) Flt. Lt. R.A. Massey, Fg. Off. K.B. Bagchi, Fg. Off. Donald Lazarus, Fg. Off. S.F. Soares and Flt. Lt. M.A. Ganapathy



Reconstructing the exact details of the aircombat and super imposing it with the version released by the Pakistanis, it was deduced that Khalil Ahmed was Ganapathy's victim while Lazarus had brought down Qureshi's Sabre. The third Sabre which went back into Pakistani territory was being flown by Wg Cdr Chaudhary. There were reports of him ejecting over the Chaugacha lake near Jessore, but later it transpired that he flew back the damaged Sabre back to Tezgaon. The Indian pilots never met the PAF POWs at any point of time.

After the battle



[Left] The Indian Pilots Roy Massey, MA Ganapathy and Don



Lazarus became heroes overnight.

[Right]T
 he Two
 Pakistani
 Pilots
 Parvez
 Mehdi
 Qureshi
 and
 Khaleel
 Ahmed
 who
 were
 captured
 after
 baling
 out.

All the dramatis personae in the story were decorated for the service. For this and subsequent role of No.22 Squadron in the conflict, the CO Wg Cdr Sikand was awarded the VSM. The three pilots , Massey, Ganapathy and Lazarus were awarded the Vir Chakra while Bagchi was given the Vayusena Medal for directing the Interception.

Roy Andrew Massey became the CO of India's second MiG-23MF Squadron, No.224, 'The Warlords'. His stint of command was less than six months. He was killed during a routine sortie over Tilpat on 28th November 1983, when his MiG-23 had a bird hit over the range. Earlier in the seventies, Mandapadu Appachu Ganapathy died in service -- beset with personal family problems, he chose to end his life and committed suicide.

Donald Lazarus had a distinguished career. He was an FCL, an Instrument Rating Instructor and a pioneer member of India's first ECM Squadron. He was also the first Commanding Officer of No.102 Trisonics, which was raised on the MiG-25R -- then (and to some extent even now) India's ultra top secret squadron. After his stint at command he was promoted to Group Captain in command of a Station. It is said that Donald Lazarus was destined for higher command, but he 'chucked it all in' and opted for premature retirement -- a decision that left many of his colleagues shocked. His reasons for the retirement were different, He has had his career and done his service to the nation, now he was answering the call of God. After retirement he settled down in

his native Conoor area working for the Christian Mission Service, an organisation with its HQ in the Nilgiris which cares for destitute and orphaned children.

The Last encounter

In 1996, Air Chief Marshal Parvez Mehdi Qureshi was appointed as the Chief of Air Staff of the Pakistan Air Force. Not many people recognised Qureshi as the same pilot who was a 'guest' of India after the Boyra air battle. When the news was reported in India, Donald Lazarus decided to write to Qureshi. Lazarus wrote a letter congratulating Qureshi for his achievement in becoming CAS and mentioned that Qureshi may not recall his earlier meeting with Lazarus which was in the air. Perhaps Lazarus did not expect a reply to the letter, but it seemed the right thing to do to wish someone well whom he had met in battle a couple of decades back.

To his surprise a staff officer for Qureshi wrote a reply saying that they have received the letter addressed to the CAS and thanking Lazarus for the greetings. Normally one would have thought that this would have been the end of the matter. But it was not to be.

Don Lazarus received a further surprise, when a letter came signed by the Pakistani CAS himself. Air Chief Marshal Qureshi expressed his thanks to Lazarus for his wishes and complimented on the 'fight' shown by the Indian Pilots on the occasion. Group Captain Lazarus still preserves the letter quite carefully, which serves to remind all that even now in the subcontinent when old rivals and enemies are neck to neck, chivalry is still alive among fighter pilots!

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Acknowledgements

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